



08

HOW TO?

Reuse
Heritage



Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Hands-On Heritage NI is a project that combines traditional heritage engagement and outreach with the introduction of a range of new digital engagement technologies, better connecting people and communities with built heritage.



This is one of ten Heritage: How To? Guides, covering a broad spectrum of ideas in relation to Northern Ireland's historic environment.

handsonheritage@uahs.org.uk

Northern Ireland has always experienced challenging weather conditions, and our buildings have traditionally been built to withstand heavy precipitation, strong winds, and low temperatures. If well maintained, our historic buildings have demonstrated that they can competently withstand these elements.

But climate change is posing an existential threat to our way of life, and it is also threatening the long-term sustainability of our historic built environment.

We must also take into consideration the environmental impact of the construction, upkeep, and demolition of buildings. These processes are the third biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United Kingdom.¹

Therefore, when assessing the impact of the climate crisis on our built heritage, there are two factors to consider. First, the substantial carbon footprint inherent in the demolition of older buildings and construction of newer ones in their place. Second, the negative impact of our changing climate on the fragile and finite resource that is our historic built environment.

Many of our historic buildings become redundant over time; this is a normal part of a building's life cycle in a modernising world. Some think that disused assets should be replaced with new buildings which, at least in the short-term, appear cleaner and more modern. But not only is this substantially less sustainable, it also severs important connections to our past, to the events and processes which have shaped the society we live in.

We must take action now. The best way to do this is through the sympathetic REUSE of our existing historic building stock.

Throughout our Heritage: How To? Guides we refer to heritage assets as buildings and monuments.

Thank you to David Bunting @ImagesNI for providing a selection of images for this guide.



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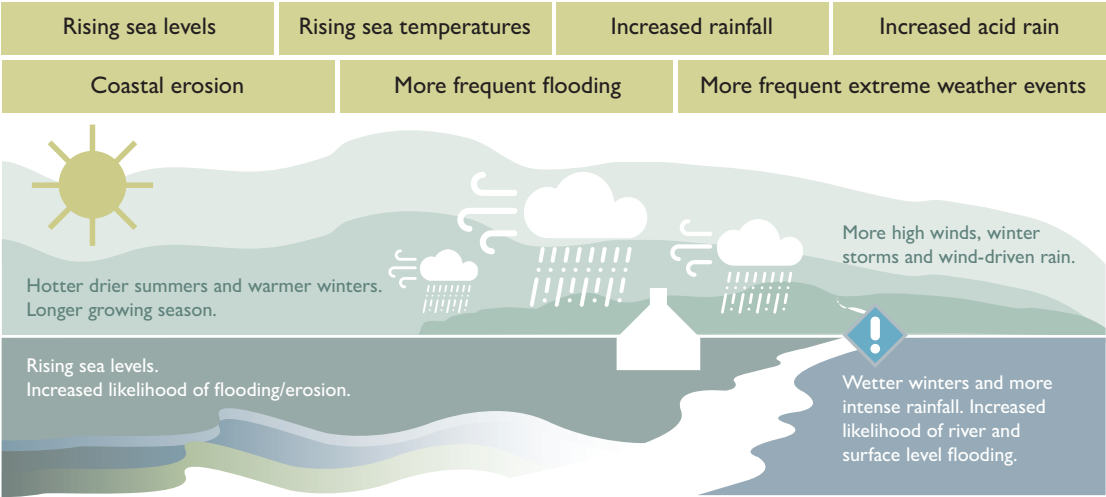
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1 | Our changing climate

Throughout its history, the Earth’s climate has always been changing. However, the term ‘climate change’ refers to the rapid changes we have seen in global climate patterns during the last 50 to 100 years. Scientific evidence shows that this is not being driven by the planet’s natural, long-term climate cycles, but as a result of the human activities which produce greenhouse gases and cause global warming.

Some of the changes we are experiencing:



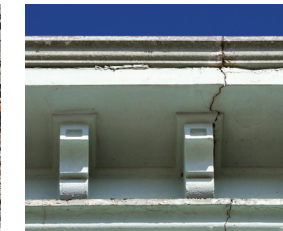
2 | Impacts of climate change on our historic buildings

Because of climate change, buildings are experiencing increased environmental stresses and strains. Those that have typically withstood the elements are becoming less able to cope. This is an additional challenge to consider in addition to typical maintenance and repair; a challenge that is likely to worsen in the short- to medium-term future.

Assets will be increasingly affected by:



Accelerated material degradation



Increased material stress



Higher likelihood of rainwater goods failure



Increased water ingress and damp



Greater material staining



Deterioration of existing infrastructure

In 2021, UAH produced a report and guide on the impact of climate change on the historic built environment. This expands upon and explains many of the points outlined throughout this guide, and can be accessed on our website:

<https://www.ulsterarchitecturalheritage.org.uk/news/impacts-of-climate-change-on-the-historic-built-environment-a-report-and-guide/>



Coastal erosion has brought Mussenden Temple, Downhill, Co. Londonderry, ever closer to the cliff edge over the years.

3 | Climate change risk assessment

When assessing the risks that climate change poses to historic buildings, there are several aspects you may want to consider:

Building Type	May give an idea of a heritage asset's general physicality and characteristics (potential challenges of climate change may be different in a conservation area, an implied concentration of heritage assets, to those faced by a single building or monument).
Location	Where a particular building is physically sited. Different locations will require different environmental considerations. For example, buildings that are at a greater elevation will be more exposed to extreme wind, and buildings near bodies of water will be subject to greater flooding risk.
Management & Monitoring	The impact of worsening environmental conditions on a building will be dictated, to some degree, by the levels of attention and management afforded to it. This, in turn, will dictate the immediacy and frequency of measures taken to react to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Assets that are well managed and monitored on a planned cyclical basis with a robust and systematic management plan in place will be overall more resilient than those not afforded such attention.
Detailing	The finer details of a historic building's architectural composition often combine the aesthetic and the practical. The detailing of elements such as hood mouldings, projecting eaves, string courses or downpipes – functional elements which shed water and protect the building façade – are often designed with both these considerations in mind. Thus, detailing makes a doubly important contribution to a historic building. This is of considerable significance in the context of the added weather challenges posed by climate change.
Materials	Building materials have always been exposed to the elements, and with historic buildings this will have been over a considerable time span. Our future climate will see the addition of more frequent extreme wind, wind-driven rainfall, and temperature events to many years of ‘normal’ weathering and deterioration. These conditions, acting on aging materials, will result in additional moisture-related problems leading to the accelerated exterior deterioration of building materials which will adversely impact internal building conditions.
Condition	Once the primary materials of the building are understood, the next step is to take a look at key elements of the building and their particular condition in more detail, regularly, as per a management and monitoring plan. It is important to check foundations, walls, roofs, windows, doors, and interiors in a guided framework, looking out for signs of increased stresses from changing environmental and meteorological conditions reflected in the fabric. It is particularly important to check rainwater goods – such as gutters, downpipes, and gullies – for blockages, in order to prevent water ingress further down the line.



4 | Responding to climate change

Why must we reuse?

The reuse of existing buildings is substantially more sustainable than the construction of new ones. This is because the CO₂ emissions produced during construction are already embodied within the existing building and not are not lost through demolition. Embodied carbon is the carbon footprint associated with a building's material fabric. This includes all the emissions from the original construction materials, the building process, interior fittings, as well as from the eventual demolition and disposal of the material at the end of the building's life. This is distinct from operational carbon, the emissions which arise from the use of the building, such as power, heating, etc.

According to English Heritage, when compared to refurbishing a traditional Victorian terrace, constructing a new building of the same size produces up to 13 times more embodied carbon. This equates to around 16.4 tonnes of CO₂, which is the equivalent of the emissions released by driving 60,000km, or from Belfast to Enniskillen and back over 200 times, in a large petrol car.¹

¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/recycle-buildings-tackle-climate-change/>





Reuse – What is it?

The ever-changing demands of our constantly evolving and modernising society mean that, over the years, certain buildings eventually become redundant in their original use. When a building is viewed as redundant, it is in danger of falling into disrepair, abandonment and, eventually, ruin. This is something we see all too frequently in Northern Ireland. But these buildings present opportunities to consider creative reuse, allowing us to preserve and sustain our heritage, as well as confront and mitigate the contribution of unnecessary demolition to climate change.

Whilst it may be tempting to try and preserve an asset's original use, throughout our history our buildings have always had to adapt to changing demands, and it is simply part of a building's life cycle to be modernised and reused to meet contemporary needs. This can be seen with the addition of extensions, upper levels added to single story dwellings, dormers added to increase light, the advent of indoor plumbing and the decline of outside toilets, and the modern expectation of central heating. Even the layout of houses has changed, with a desire for open plan living in place of traditionally smaller compartmentalised rooms.

The process of reusing historic buildings involves careful and sensitive adaptation for uses that meet modern-day needs. This may result in the inclusion of a sensitive extension, internal reconfiguration, or the addition of new fixtures and fittings, all of which will need to complement the existing historic fabric. Sensitive reuse and/or adaptation is likely to contribute positively to a building's story. At the same time, inappropriate reuse can significantly detract from a building's special interest.

A building in use not only provides an incentive for regular repair and maintenance, but also deters unwanted behaviours. Heritage crimes, such as vandalism and arson, are more prevalent in buildings that are not occupied or properly secured and monitored. While full, permanent occupancy of a building is desirable, it is not always possible. In cases where it is not, owners are encouraged to explore options of partial and/or temporary (meanwhile) use. Whilst meanwhile use is only a temporary fix it can, in conjunction with the arrangement of adequate security measures, afford a building greater protection. Furthermore, the presence of users and the appearance of occupancy can prevent further deterioration of the surrounding street or area.

Below are some ideas for reuse, be it meanwhile or permanent:

Larger spaces	Smaller spaces
Music venue Design studio Apartments Market hall Food hall Performance spaces Gallery	Shop Restaurant/café Workshop Studio Office Community centre Holiday accommodation Consulting room

Historic building reuse does not only include large scale interventions. Small steps can go a long way towards a sustainable future.

Sustainable improvements to make our historic buildings more energy efficient include:

- Increasing insulation to prevent unnecessary heat loss. This can include the addition of boards or wool under the floor or between ceiling joists, or the inclusion of sympathetic double glazing where possible
- Using non-invasive solar panels on adjoining land and curtilage
- Using energy efficient appliances and eco-friendly light bulbs
- Draught proofing windows and doors
- Choosing low-impact or sustainably sourced natural materials and finishes
- Adding rainwater/greywater harvesting systems

Reasons for reusing buildings:

- More environmentally sustainable than the construction of new buildings
- Can limit construction costs as most of the building fabric is already in place
- Reuse bolsters historic building and monument longevity
- Maintains character of surrounding area
- Reinforces our cultural identity and our connection to the historic past
- Acts as catalyst for regeneration and (re)growth
- Reuses existing (and often high quality) building materials

NOTE:

It is important to check if planning permission and/or Listed Building Consent is required before carrying out any works to a building. It is recommended to contact your District Council or the Department for Communities when planning any repairs to a heritage asset.

Reusing a historic building: what should you be thinking about?

The restoration and reuse of a historic building is an admirable goal. In most cases, it is possible to argue that reuse will have significant benefits for the special architectural or historic interest of the building. However, with reuse comes some associated challenges, and you may need to ask yourself the following questions before you embark on a reuse project:

- Do you fully understand the building from the inside and out?
- What are you trying to achieve?
- Have all potential uses been fully explored? Is there no way the original use can be maintained?
- Is a new use likely to be viable for a foreseeable period without major changes or additions, ensuring a future for the building?
- Are you prepared to undertake the maintenance and upkeep of the property?
- Are you willing to embrace and respect the building’s history and character?
- Is there an immediate need for a permanent change in use? Would urgent protective works, to allow for a short-term meanwhile use, be a preferable alternative?

Some other factors to consider:

Building’s Character	Is the building listed? What is the extent of rebuilding required if the building is derelict or a ruin? Does the proposed reuse enhance or detract from the building’s special character interest? Are the works proposed reversible?
Longevity of reuse	What is the vision for long-term reuse? Is there an opportunity for permanent occupancy or is meanwhile use more viable? Will the building be fully occupied or only certain areas e.g. the ground floor? Who will be managing or evaluating the project?
Budget	Does your budget match your ambition? How far can it be stretched? Is the project viable given your budget? Can the project be phased?
Funding	Are there set outcomes to achieve upon award of funding? How long does the funding last? Are there project milestones to be met?
Appropriate permissions	Planning permissions Listed Building Consent Change of class/use Development within a Conservation Area Protected trees and wildlife Impact on standing or buried archaeological remains



5 | Case study

The Court House, Bangor, Co. Down

Bangor Petty Sessions Court lay derelict from 2013 until it was refurbished and repurposed as an arts venue, known as ‘The Court House’, which opened in 2022. This building serves as an excellent case study for adaptive reuse, which can be used to illustrate many of the ideas discussed in this guide.

FACT FILE

- Built in 1866 as the Bangor branch of the Belfast Banking Company
- Two-storey, five-bay building in the Italianate Classical style
- Grade B2 Listed
- Unknown architect. Possibly James McNea, a Belfast architect who had designed the Belfast Bank in Ballymoney
- Became Court of Petty Sessions in 1954, following the relocation of the bank
- Heavily fortified during ‘the Troubles’, with steel cage and bulletproof glass added
- Courthouse decommissioned in 2013, lying vacant thereafter
- Added to the Heritage at Risk Register in 2018

Following the decommissioning of the courthouse in 2013, the building remained the property of the Department of Justice. In 2020, the building was passed from the Department to Open House, a music and arts charity, who had been working since 2015 to develop a restoration plan and business model which would see the space transformed into a viable multi-purpose arts venue, accessible and open to the whole community. The venue opened in November 2022, and now hosts concerts, film screenings, and a bar for food and drink.

This acquisition of the building by Open House was made possible through a **Community Asset Transfer (CAT)**. This is a process that allows a community organisation or charities to take control of publicly-owned land or buildings, at less than market value, if there is recognition that such a transfer will benefit the local community. Open House further availed of around £1.7 million through grants and donations from various funds, charities, and public bodies.

Several interventions were made to improve the building's energy efficiency and sustainability. The building has been well insulated, and new sensor-operated LED lighting systems have been installed, allowing very specific control of lighting and automatic shutting off of lights in spaces which are not in use.

Perhaps most importantly, the reuse of this building sustains a connection to the city's historic past. The bank which previously occupied the building was constructed to accommodate Bangor's growing population, bolstered by the arrival of the railway to the town. Its Italianate Classical façade spoke to a desire to emulate the wealth and power of Renaissance Italy, and was an architectural style favoured by prominent architects at the time, such as W.J. Barre and Charles Lanyon. After being converted into a courthouse, and with the onset of 'the Troubles', the building was encased in an array of safety features, such as a steel cage and bulletproof glass. The building's elegance and finery which once symbolised economic prosperity and optimism gave way to an oppressive brutalism which reflected the very real security threat during those years.

Had the building have been allowed to fall into ruin, demolished, and replaced, we would be deprived of a witness to the ebb and flow of history not just in Bangor, but also more widely in Northern Ireland. Its own life cycle embodies the evolving society that we live in. The Court House is an excellent illustration of the changing demands of modern society, and why buildings which lose their purpose do not need to be lost in their entirety.



For more information on How To?
Reuse Heritage visit the
Hands-On Heritage website
www.handsonheritage-ni.org.uk
where you can access related
Heritage: How To? Guides.

Promotion – Protection – Conservation – **Regeneration**

Ulster Architectural Heritage (UAH) works to promote the historic built environment, its protection, conservation, and heritage-led regeneration, through advice and support, advocacy, publications, events, and project delivery. Since its formation in 1967, UAH has established itself as the lead independent voice for the historic built environment across the nine counties of Ulster, a fearless campaigner for historic buildings, a generous resource of information on local architecture, and a source of advice on conservation. UAH has had much success in influencing public opinion in favour of conservation of our historic built environment. UAH carries out reports, assessments, monitoring of the historic built environment, and makes representations relating to planning and policy. UAH educates, engages, and informs on built heritage through a wide range of events, publications, and projects.



Ulster Architectural Heritage
The Old Museum Building
7 College Square North
Belfast BT1 6AR

