

Historic Environment Division

Guidance on Setting and the Historic Environment

February 2018



Historic Environment Division's Aim

“Supporting and sustaining vibrant communities and a strong economy through realising the significant, ongoing value of our historic environment”

Our historic environment provides authentic and attractive places, which increase our pride, character and identity, which can lead to improved wellbeing and community engagement, and increased prosperity through tourism, investment, skills, regeneration and creativity. In short, our heritage is about People, Place, Partnership and Prosperity.

Historic Environment Division works in collaboration with a very wide range of individuals and organisations in the public, private and third sectors to ensure that, together, we record, protect, conserve and promote our heritage in ways which support and sustain our economy and our communities. We provide expertise and skills, seeking to improve the understanding, caring for and appreciation of our heritage, and to ensure a suitable balance between respecting a rich past and building a successful future.

Cover Image: Castle Ward, Co. Down.

Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historic Interest make a valuable contribution to the quality and character of our countryside. The designed landscape at Castle Ward incorporates listed buildings and historic monuments, and displays the transition from formal to informal layouts during the 18th and 19th centuries, set against the backdrop of Strangford Lough.

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Executive Summary

Northern Ireland's archaeological sites and monuments and listed buildings are an essential part of our historic environment. They form a unique record of our shared heritage, representing over nine thousand years of human activity and achievement, and contribute in many ways to our understanding of the past and the present.

They add to the quality of our lives by helping sustain and enhance the sense of local distinctiveness which is such an important aspect of the character and appearance of our cities, towns, villages, countryside and landscape. In helping to evoke and understand the past they can also play an increasing role in attracting tourism, aiding in the creation of jobs and growing the economy.

The setting of heritage assets is inseparably and intrinsically linked to their physical remains and to their significance.

This document sets out guidance on how DfC Historic Environment Division (HED) develops advice to local councils, heritage consultants, and others on planning applications and land-use change that may have an impact upon the settings of heritage assets and related designations such as Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest (ASAs) and Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes.

The guidance includes a definition of setting, identifies those key aspects of setting which can contribute to the significance of a heritage asset, and outlines a three-stage process for assessing the impacts of change upon setting.

It is hoped that the content of this document will assist planning authorities and applicants, heritage consultants and other stakeholders achieve a consistent approach when considering setting and the historic environment in Northern Ireland.

This document was produced by HED in consultation with a range of stakeholders in the historic environment sector in Northern Ireland. Particular feedback and assistance was provided by the following organisations:

Historic Buildings Council
Historic Monuments Council
Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland
Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
The Institute of Historic Building Conservation
Royal Society of Ulster Architects
Conservation Committee



Devenish Island, Co. Fermanagh. The attractive lakeland setting of this early medieval ecclesiastical site, widely recognised as a tourism attraction and iconic site for Northern Ireland, is very sensitive to change.

1. Introduction

For the purposes of this guidance document archaeological sites and monuments, listed buildings and related heritage sites and designations are collectively referred to as heritage assets. The concept of a heritage asset embraces both the physical remains and the setting in which they occur. Thus, the preservation of a heritage asset necessarily includes the retention of an appropriate setting.

The desirability of preserving any heritage asset – whether statutorily protected or otherwise – and its setting is a material consideration in determining planning applications. The main policy framework for the protection of heritage assets in the planning process in Northern Ireland is set out in Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS 6) Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage¹. Planning applications will be assessed by planning authorities on the individual merits of each case.



Cloghfin, Islandmagee, Co. Antrim. A listed thatched cottage which sits comfortably within a rural coastal setting.

The decision-making process, in which HED is a statutory consultee, takes into account all relevant planning policies and material considerations, including the intrinsic importance of the heritage asset in question, as well as its potential uses for amenity, tourism and education purposes, and weighs these against other factors, such as the need for – and the benefits of – the proposed development.

¹ Local Development Plans are currently being prepared by Councils, in line with the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS), which will replace PPS 6 once adopted.

2. The Setting of Heritage Assets

2.1 Definition of Setting

The term 'setting' applies to the physical space that is part of – and contributes to – the significance and distinctive character of a heritage asset, and through which the asset may be seen, experienced, understood and enjoyed.

2.2 Significance, Distinctive Character and Context

Heritage assets derive their significance and distinctive character from a range of factors, cultural traditions and meanings, many of which will comprise aspects of their setting. These factors may include perceived social, spiritual, historic, artistic, aesthetic, natural, scientific or other cultural values. They may also derive significance and distinctive character from physical, visual, spiritual and other cultural contexts and relationships, for example with other assets or the surrounding historic, natural or urban environment. These relationships can result from planned acts, spiritual beliefs, historical events, or through a cumulative process of use and cultural traditions over time.

The significance and distinctive character of a heritage asset is embodied in the physical fabric of the asset, as well as in its use, meanings, associations and relationships with other assets, places and objects. Our understanding of significance may change over time as a result of new information and research, or as a result of use and community values.

The context of a heritage asset can describe any relationship, both perceived and designed, between the asset and other heritage assets.



Belfast City Hall, Co. Antrim. This listed building dominates the streetscape of Belfast city centre. Part of its setting is viewed here along Donegall Place, which contains a number of other listed buildings. The setting extends well beyond the actual grounds of the City Hall.

2.3 The Extent of Setting

The settings of heritage assets are assessed on the individual merits of each case. This process will take into account various factors including inter-relationships with other buildings, structures, sites and monuments, the original purpose and use of the heritage asset, the level of survival and the nature of the surrounding area. Setting can extend beyond the visual envelope of a heritage asset and transcend the curtilage of buildings and modern property boundaries.

2.3.1 Setting is a Dynamic Concept

Setting cannot always be definitively and permanently described as a spatially bounded area associated with a set distance from any specific heritage asset. Setting may change as the heritage asset and the surrounding area continuously evolve over time, or as the heritage asset becomes better understood. It is HED's role to advise and manage this change, in order that it does not occur in an adverse manner and that the significance of an asset is



Tullaghoge, Co. Tyrone. The setting of this early medieval royal rath – on a prominent hilltop with reciprocal views over the surrounding landscape – was crucial to its development and later use as the inauguration site of the O’Neills.

retained. In some cases HED may consult its statutory advisory councils on matters relating to the setting(s) of statutorily protected assets.

2.3.2 Setting is a Cumulative Concept

Historic landscapes and areas – such as ASAs, battlefields, Conservation Areas, Areas of Townscape Character and Historic Parks, Gardens, and Demesnes – can include many heritage assets with both discrete and overlapping settings, as well as having an overall setting of their own. Individual heritage assets may have group value as part of a complex of related assets in the surrounding area. Where an asset has limited or no ancillary land (for example a listed building in an urban context such as a terrace) its setting may include a number of other properties, both listed and non-listed, or even a whole street. Inappropriate changes to the setting

of one asset may affect the integrity of the setting of others nearby.

2.3.3 Setting and Curtilage

Curtilage may be a component of the settings of certain heritage assets, particularly listed buildings. Curtilage is not legally defined in planning policy, but the extent of curtilage can be described as the consideration of ownership (past and present) around heritage assets. Setting often extends beyond property boundaries, fences, walls, hedges or other ‘curtilage’ structures.

In addition, setting is not defined by ‘pink wash’ indicators; these were used on ‘First Survey’ listing maps, associated with heritage buildings and structures, to indicate to planners the immediate area around a listed structure which should be especially considered in any development

proposals. Current listing maps can indicate much wider ‘pink wash’ areas, but equally these should not be regarded as a definitive indication of setting, and have no statutory or legal basis.

2.4 Aspects of Setting

The settings of all heritage assets are sensitive to change. Impacts upon the settings of listed buildings, sites and monuments in State Care, scheduled sites and monuments, and other sites and monuments which would merit scheduling or listing, require particular consideration. Settings can be complex and multi-faceted – any assessment of the setting of a heritage asset should include, as a minimum, consideration of the following aspects, although other, often intangible aspects such as ambience, may also be considered:

2.4.1 Physical

Physical aspects of setting include: man-made structures; historic streetscapes; historic buildings and building groups; designed landscapes; airspace, coastlines and seascapes; topography, natural features and interactions with the natural and historic environment; rivers and route-ways within the surrounding area of the heritage asset or used in association with it.

2.4.2 Visual

Visual aspects of setting include a variety of views of, across, or including the heritage asset; views of the surrounding area from or through the heritage asset; and views along route-ways, or towards designed vistas such as borrowed landscape, planting, or built features. These may incorporate views towards and the settings of numerous other heritage assets.



Tynan Village Cross, Co. Armagh. This early medieval high cross is associated with a once major ecclesiastical site. The cross has been moved from its original location resulting in changes to its setting.

Heritage assets do not need to be visually prominent to have a setting and some heritage assets will have an experienced setting which extends beyond the area of visibility. The experience of related aspects of an asset’s setting, for example elements of a designed landscape, need not be visually connected or visible at the same time.

The experience of an asset’s setting is not wholly visual, but may include a site’s ambience, sense of remoteness, tranquillity or removal from the modern world.

2.4.3 Functional

Functional aspects of setting include the aesthetic, architectural, commemorative, historical, social, spiritual, symbolic, technological, traditional knowledge and/or other tangible or intangible values associated with human activity. These may include designed or perceived interactions with the natural environment or with other heritage assets in the surrounding landscape.

3. Considering Setting, Development and Land-Use Change

There are three key stages in considering the impact of a proposed development or land-use change on the setting of a heritage asset:

- **Stage 1:** identify the heritage assets that might be affected.
- **Stage 2:** define the setting by establishing how the surroundings contribute to the significance of the heritage assets in the ways they are understood, appreciated and experienced.
- **Stage 3:** assess how any change would impact upon that setting.



Beaghmore stone circle and alignment complex, Co. Tyrone. This Bronze Age ceremonial complex of 7 stone circles, 12 cairns and 10 stone alignments is a monument in State Care and sits within an Area of Significant Archaeological Interest. Far-reaching views to the surrounding landscape, which retains a remote and unimproved character, and to other sites and monuments, contribute to the significance of this regionally important site.

3.1 Stage 1: Identify the Heritage Assets

An initial desk-based assessment of existing historic environment records and other sources of information should be used to gather baseline information. Accurate assessment of setting must also include a site visit(s). The baseline information should identify all the potentially affected heritage assets and their settings, including information on listed buildings; archaeological sites and monuments; historic landscapes; battlefields; industrial heritage; parks, gardens and designed landscapes; ASAs; world heritage sites; conservation areas; and designated wrecks.

3.2 Stage 2: Define and Analyse Setting

Understanding the setting of a heritage asset is essential to appreciating its significance and the process of analysing setting should include an understanding of the history, evolution and character of an asset's surroundings. Heritage assets have a setting whether they are above ground or below ground and also whether they are publically accessible or not. Setting can incorporate many things. The following are examples of issues that should be considered in any analysis:

- the contribution of the surrounding area to our ability to appreciate and understand the heritage asset;
- any changes to the surrounding area over time and how this affects how the asset is experienced;
- the location of the heritage asset in relation to other, not necessarily contemporary, assets;
- key vistas to, from and across the heritage asset and its setting, including interactions with other heritage assets and natural features in the surrounding landscape;



Wellbrook Beetling Mill, Co. Tyrone. How industrial heritage sites such as this listed mill have been incorporated into the contemporary landscape is important when considering setting. The settings of industrial heritage sites are likely to have altered significantly over time.

- the contribution of the heritage asset to our ability to appreciate and understand its surroundings, for example as a local landmark;
- historic, artistic or community traditions or values associated with a heritage asset.

Heritage assets both contribute to and gain significance from the character of the Northern Irish landscape. Landscape character assessment is a useful tool in the analysis of setting and specific guidance on the key landscape character areas in Northern Ireland and their sensitivities to change may be found in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (2000) and the Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (2015), both commissioned by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

3.3 Stage 3: Assess Change

Consideration must be given to whether a proposed development can be integrated sensitively within, or whether a proposed use is compatible with, the setting of the heritage asset. Depending on the nature of the heritage asset, relatively small changes in the wider landscape or surroundings may affect its setting.



Narrow Water Castle, Co. Down. This 16th-century castle sits at a crossing point on the Newry River close to where it enters Carlingford Lough. The well-known tourist views of the site are an important aspect of the castle's setting and cultural significance.

An understanding of the impact of the proposed change upon setting should not be confined to whether key views to and from the heritage asset are interrupted, but should also assess whether the proposed change would dominate or detract in a way that affects our ability to understand, appreciate, experience and enjoy the heritage asset. When assessing the impact of change on setting it is important, among other factors, to include analysis of:

- the visual impact of the proposed change relative to the scale of the heritage asset and the key attributes of its setting;
- the presence, extent, character and scale of the existing man-made structures within the surroundings of the heritage asset, and how the proposed development compares to this;
- the individual and cumulative effects of the proposed change. Sometimes relatively small changes, or a series of small changes, can have a major impact upon our ability to appreciate and understand heritage assets;
- the ability of the setting of the heritage asset to absorb new development without eroding its key characteristics;

- the effect of the proposed change on qualities of the existing setting, such as sense of remoteness, evocation of the past or specific events, interactions with the surrounding area and other assets, sense of place, cultural identity and spiritual responses.

A range of tools may be employed in defining and assessing changes to setting, for example historic landscape analysis using Geographical Information Systems (GIS), which may include viewshed analysis, digital terrain models and data acquired from LiDAR survey to help contextualise the landscape setting of an asset. Photomontages can be particularly useful in assessing the potential visual impacts of development proposals upon setting.

The ICOMOS document **Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties** (2011), while focussing on World Heritage Sites, contains useful guidance on assessment methodologies which may be applied to any heritage asset.

A non-exhaustive list of suggested factors for consideration as part of any assessment is included in Appendix A.

4. Outcomes

The HED document [‘Consultation Guide May 2016 – A guide to consulting on development management applications’](#) provides information regarding different types of planning applications and recommended levels of supporting information expected by HED in our role at a statutory consultee. This may include Design and Access Statements, Contextual Elevations, Archaeological Impact Assessments and Historic Fabric Assessments. Pre-application Discussions (PADs) are recommended for large-scale, prominent or complex proposals and those which may affect the relationship between significant or multiple heritage assets and their settings.

Certain types of development require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Assessment of the potential impacts of development upon the setting of a heritage asset or multiple assets will normally be necessary as part of the EIA, or as part of a stand-alone Archaeological Impact Assessment.

Where an assessment indicates that there will be an adverse effect upon the setting of a heritage asset or area, in the first instance options to minimise or avoid the impact should be considered early in the design process. Effective ways to mitigate impacts upon setting include careful consideration of siting, layout and design. The use of sympathetic materials and finishes, or the retention and augmentation of existing vegetation, may also help avoid or reduce adverse impacts upon setting.



Dunluce Castle, Co. Antrim. This late medieval fortification enjoys a spectacular coastal setting. The surrounding landscape contains below-ground remains of past settlement associated with the castle. These buried remains are part of the castle's setting, but also have a setting in their own right.

The assessment of the setting of heritage assets is normally undertaken by archaeologists, conservation accredited architects and other specialist consultants. It is important that related reports are comprehensive in their assessment and written in a form accessible to the general public, as the information is likely to be available to decision makers and the wider public alike.

Establishing a definition of setting, what constitutes an impact upon setting, and how to measure it can be the subject of considerable professional debate. If you have a proposed development that may affect the setting of a heritage asset you can contact HED's Heritage Development & Change Branch for guidance in the first instance.

HED recognises that the analysis of setting, and the policy context for its consideration in the planning process in Northern Ireland, continues to evolve. Consequently it is intended that this guidance document will be subject to review after a period of three years.

Appendix A

Assessing Potential Impacts upon the Setting of Heritage Assets

The following is a non-exhaustive list of factors to consider when assessing the potential impacts of development upon the setting of a heritage asset:

Location and siting of development

- Proximity to asset
- Extent of development
- Position in relation to landform
- Position in relation to other built development
- Degree to which location will physically or visually impact upon or isolate the asset
- Position in relation to key views to, from and across the asset

Other effects of the development

- Change to built surroundings and spaces
- Change to skyline
- Change to general character (e.g. suburbanising or industrialising)
- Lighting effects and 'light spill'
- Changes to public access, use or amenity

- Changes to archaeological context, soil chemistry or hydrology
- Changes to land use, land cover, tree cover
- Changes to communications, accessibility, permeability

The form and appearance of the development

- Prominence, dominance or conspicuousness
- Competition with or distraction from the asset
- Dimensions, scale and massing
- Proportions
- Visual permeability (extent to which it can be seen through)
- Materials (texture, colour, reflectiveness etc.)
- Architectural style or design
- Introduction of movement or activity
- Seasonal changes

Appendix B

Setting Guidance in International Charters and Conventions

The importance of conserving and protecting the setting of heritage assets is recognised in a number of international conventions and charters. Conventions are normally international treaties. Once the United Kingdom has ratified a convention it has obligations to implement its requirements. Charters are statements of internationally recognised best practice that should be taken as guidance.

Conventions

Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (**Granada Convention**), 1985.

European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (**Valletta Convention**), 1992.

European Landscape Convention (**Florence Convention**), 2000.

Charters

The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (**Venice Charter**), 1964.

ICOMOS Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas. (**Xi'an Declaration**), 2005.

New Zealand ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value. 2010.

The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (**Burra Charter**), 2013.

The Preservation of Historic Gardens (**Florence Charter**), 1981.

Other Regional Guidance

The Setting of Heritage Assets. Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3. Historic England, 2015.

Managing Change in the Historic Environment. Setting. Historic Environment Scotland, 2016.



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This guidance document aims to assist planning authorities and applicants, heritage consultants and other stakeholders achieve a consistent approach when considering setting and the historic environment in Northern Ireland. This guide does not attempt to provide a detailed account of the legislation and policy that underpin planning matters in Northern Ireland, and is not intended to be a source of definitive legal advice. Responsibility

for planning matters rests with local councils and DfI. Reference should be made to the actual legislation referred to in this document and if any discrepancy or conflict exists between this guide and legislation, the provisions of the legislation will prevail. Further information can be obtained from the Department for Communities website: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk>