

Retrofit of domestic buildings under PAS 2035

A guide to assessing the significance of traditionally constructed buildings that are not protected

Introduction

One of the aims of PAS 2035 (Retrofitting dwellings for improved energy efficiency) is the ‘protection and enhancement of the architectural and cultural heritage as represented by the building stock’.

Under clause 8.4.3 of PAS 2035 it is a requirement that where a dwelling is of traditional construction, an assessment of significance shall be carried out in accordance with the guidance in BS 7913 (Guide to the conservation of historic buildings). This guide and the accompanying template provide a simplified version of the BS 7913 significance assessment.

Dwellings that are ‘protected’ are not covered by this guide. Protected is defined by PAS 2035 as ‘nationally designated listed buildings or buildings in conservation areas or world heritage sites’. For such buildings, a full assessment should be carried out according to BS 7913. Some unprotected post 1919 dwellings also have significance, and the approach outlined in this guide can be used to assess such buildings.

Only those aspects of a dwelling’s heritage significance that would be affected by the retrofit proposals are covered by this guide. Technical or financial issues that might inform the design proposals are not included.

Assessing significance is part of a process. Where an assessment identifies that a traditional building has some significance, particularly associated with architectural appearance, the Retrofit Designer (and Retrofit Co-ordinator) should take this into account when selecting and designing retrofit measures. Once measure/s have been identified, if a proposed measure may have an impact on an aspect of a building identified as significant, a Heritage Impact Assessment should be carried out as part of the options appraisal. Any opportunities for enhancing significance should also be considered.

What are buildings of traditional construction?

Buildings of traditional construction are defined by PAS 2035 as ‘construction consisting of solid brick or stone external walls, or pre-1919 timber framed walls with any infill’.

Traditional solid wall construction and timber framed construction differ significantly from modern construction in that modern buildings are designed to keep moisture out with layers of largely impervious materials. Traditional construction by contrast absorbs moisture and releases it slowly back into the environment as conditions become dryer. Building Regulations in England¹, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all note that special considerations apply to buildings of traditional construction with permeable fabric.

¹ England: Part L1B 3.8-3.9. Wales: Part L1B 12.2. Scotland: Domestic Technical Handbook 6.2.8.

Why is an assessment of significance needed?

An assessment of significance gives an understanding of what matters and why. It should then be used to assess the impact of any proposals for retrofit on that significance.

Assessing significance needs to be undertaken before retrofit proposals are formulated and the design work starts. The assessment should be proportionate to the building's importance and many traditional buildings will only need a brief assessment.

Where the building has some form of local designation (for example local listing) and a proposed change requires planning permission, the assessment should help the local planning authority come to a judgement about the level of impact and therefore the merits of any proposal.

What is significance?

A building's significance can be seen as the value it has for this and future generations. This might be due to its design, construction and craftsmanship, or its association with an historical event or person, or even a local industry. Some architectural features of buildings also have a practical function - for example, hood mouldings, sills and deep eaves help a building to shed water effectively.

The setting of a dwelling – its relationship to its surroundings – may also be part of its significance. For example, in terraced housing, the context of the individual dwelling within the whole terrace may be an important element of its significance. If one part of the terrace is changed this might diminish the significance of the whole terrace.

Significance can be looked at in terms of key values²:

Values	Explanation	Example
Architectural & Aesthetic	The quality of design, construction and craftsmanship of buildings and the character of their setting.	Local materials, decorative brickwork or render, arches, lintels and other details all contribute.
Communal	Many people value the appearance of older buildings.	Traditional buildings and associated streetscapes provide a clear sense of place and identity.
Evidential	Older buildings and their setting can inform us about how and why they were built, and how they were used.	Surviving original fabric provides valuable evidence.
Historical	Buildings may have associations with specific people or events or illustrate a past way of life.	The birthplace or residence of a historical figure, or an association with a particular industry.

Retrofit work can also provide an opportunity to reveal and enhance significance. For example, a new double-glazed timber sash window to the original pattern could replace a later replacement window that has diminished the significance of the dwelling.

² Historic England now has a slightly different list of values from Historic Environment Scotland and Cadw in Wales. The table draws on their guidance and is adapted for use in unprotected traditional buildings.

How is an assessment of significance carried out?

The PAS 2035 Significance Survey Checklist should be used by an Assessor qualified in assessment of traditional buildings to capture the key aspects of significance.

A desk-based exercise can establish via the local planning authority whether the documentary history and significance of the dwelling is already recorded. Although the dwellings being assessed here are not nationally designated, they may still have a form of local recognition or designation.

This might be in the form of:

- Local listing
- Inclusion in the Local Plan
- Inclusion in the Historic Environment Record (HER)

Where retrofit could affect the appearance of a dwelling, an analysis of any significant building elements and materials should be undertaken. In particular, attention should be given to the following typical building elements:

- **Wall materials and decoration:** External wall materials are an essential part of the character of a building. Local materials are particularly important to a sense of place, but so is the way they were used, the coursing and dressing of stone, the bonding of brick, the forming of arches and the decoration of render. Such significance may have been diminished by changes such as cement repointing or renders - which could also affect building performance.
- **Windows & Doors:** Windows are often referred to as the 'eyes of a building'. Traditional windows, their glazing, and the detailing of their openings are important parts of the character and significance of older houses and historic areas. They are integral to the design, often made with great skill and ingenuity with materials of a higher quality than are generally available today. Original doors are comparatively rare but, where they remain, they are an important reference to the original design.
- **Roofs:** The roof is often the most striking feature of a building. Some terraces of housing still have relatively uniform roof materials which contribute to the significance of the entire terrace. The roof structure is also likely to be the least altered part which can hold important information about the dwelling's age and significance. Roof coverings, like wall materials, can also have a local significance, and chimneys also contribute to the character of an area.
- **Internal features:** The layout and detailing inside a dwelling, including joinery, plasterwork and floor surfaces, chimney breasts and fireplaces all contribute to a dwelling's character. Some internal historic features might be affected by retrofit works. For example, ceiling cornices are likely to be obscured by internal wall insulation. Solid floor insulation would affect any decorative tiled floors. Suspended timber ground floors can be retained with carefully designed insulation measures.

Where the presence of features such as those listed above is identified, the appropriate box should be ticked on the **PAS 2035 Significance Survey Checklist** and detail added in the notes.

PAS 2035 Significance Survey Template

This survey template should only be used in conjunction with the PAS 2035 **“Guidance to assessing the significance of traditional buildings that are not protected”**. The survey output constitutes this form plus accompanying photographs.

Address	
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Form and Context

Year built (or range of dates)		
Local recognition Add notes	Is the building locally listed, mentioned in the Local Plan or in the Historic Environment Record?	Yes/No
Built form (Tick one)	Mid-terraced	
	End terrace	
	Semi-detached	
	Detached	
	Apartment	
Setting Add notes	Similarity to adjacent buildings (e.g. similar roof covering or wall materials)	Yes/No
	Importance in townscape/landscape or associations with people/events	Yes/No

Building Elements

Roof (Main section)	Is the roof covering significant? (e.g. natural slate, hand-made clay tile, stone, metal, thatch)	Yes/No
Walls (Main section)	Is the exterior wall surface significant? (e.g. brick, stone, lime render)	Yes/No
	Are any features visible? (e.g. brickwork patterns, oversailing courses, mouldings)	Yes/No
	Has the appearance of the wall been modified by later additions? (e.g. cement render or cement repointing)	Yes/No
Windows	Are any of the windows of the original pattern?	Yes/No
	Is there any historic glass present	Yes/No
Internal features	Are there any internal features of significance on external walls?	Yes/No
	Are there any significant ground floor materials present? (e.g. stone, decorative tile or original floorboards)	Yes/No

Other Considerations

Alterations Add notes & dates	Have there been any substantial changes to the building which have diminished or enhanced significance?	Yes/No
Enhancement	Is there potential to enhance significance? (e.g. restoring windows to their original pattern)	Yes/No
Notes	1. 2.	

NOTE 1 Acknowledgment is given to the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance (STBA) for the drafting of this document.

NOTE 2 This document is commissioned text from expert authorities in their industry. It has been commissioned, edited and peer-reviewed before publication but remains the personal opinion of the individual experts who have provided it. It is not official British Standards guidance. Accordingly, BSI cannot accept liability for any direct or indirect loss or damage arising from a reliance on the commentary except to the extent that such liability may not be excluded by law.