

LOVE YOUR OLD HOME

Making your traditional home warmer and cheaper to run

If your home was built before 1919, and has solid walls (i.e. there are no cavities to fill with insulation), then it's known as a 'traditional dwelling' in conservation terms.

Traditional dwellings contribute greatly to our understanding of the past; they tell us many things about the way people used to live. The 'clues' found in individual houses can combine to tell us a bigger story, like the rise and fall of a local industry, changes in religious practices, or the evolution of building techniques. The people who built your home and lived in it before you may have left a wealth of information that can help you understand its story.

Your chapter in the story

Improving your home to make it more energy efficient is just another chapter in that story. We live at a time when fuel prices are at a historic high and we now understand that our energy use is contributing to climate change. So reducing energy use in your home is likely to be more important to you than it was for its past inhabitants.

The changes you make now will contribute to the story of your home, telling those who come after how our generation adapted to these pressures.

But while there is almost certainly some opportunity to improve the energy efficiency of your home, it's important to bear in mind the impact that change could have, both on the historic significance of your home as it stands, and on the fabric of the building itself. Get it

wrong, and you could undermine the historic value of your home, and also cause physical damage to it, both of which could cost you more in the long run.

Get the balance right, and you'll have a warmer, more comfortable home that can continue to help us understand our national story for decades, or even centuries, to come.



Back of Park View, 1906: From the amazing 'whatsthatpicture' collection www.flickr.com/people/whatsthatpicture

STEP 1



Find out if your home is listed, or in a Conservation Area

Listed buildings

Listing is a process that provides legal protection to individual buildings. Having a listed home can be very interesting, as the listing schedule will contain information that explains its history and why it is considered so important. However, you will need to check with your local authority before making any alterations to improve the energy efficiency of a listed home.

Conservation Areas

Some listed buildings are also in a Conservation Area. But not all buildings in Conservation Areas are listed. Conservation Areas are designated to protect a whole collection of buildings, street furniture, trees, road layouts and other features which, in combination, have either character or appearance which it is desirable to protect or enhance. Being in a Conservation Area is no less important than having a listed building. That's

because changes you make could affect the 'group value' of the whole area.

You should seek advice and permissions from your local council about making any changes to your home. You'll need to consider what impact your proposals would have on the Conservation Area as a whole. Making big changes such as adding external solid wall insulation or new windows to your home could have the knock-on effect of undermining the character of the whole group.

Historic significance

Even if your home isn't listed or in a Conservation Area, that doesn't mean it won't have any historic significance, so it's worth using the questionnaire on the following page to check. Also, some traditional homes are constructed from materials that could be damaged through inappropriate energy efficiency improvements. So it's important to get a basic understanding of how your home was built and how air and moisture move around it, before you make any decisions on how to improve it.



There are nearly 400,000 listed buildings in the UK. Grade II buildings are nationally important and of special interest; 92% of all listed buildings are in this class and it's the most likely grade of listing for a home. Grade II* buildings are particularly important buildings of 'more than special interest'; 5.5% of listed buildings are Grade II*. Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest, and can even be internationally important; only 2.5% of listed buildings are Grade I.

Street view of Newton House on Kensington Church Street, London, named after Sir Isaac Newton (though it's likely he never lived here). From www.rbkcllocalstudies.wordpress.com

STEP 2



Understand what heritage 'significance' means

To start working out which energy efficiency retrofit options may be most appropriate for your home, you need to think about how each part of your building contributes to its heritage value. This is known as its 'significance'.

English Heritage has developed a system to help us understand why a place has heritage significance, by looking at four types of values:

1) *Evidential value*. This comes from a place's potential to yield up evidence about past human activity. e.g. There could be archeological remains underneath, or you can tell that part of the house used to be a stable.

2) *Historical value* derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. This tends to be by illustrating an aspect of the past or by providing an association with it, e.g. the house has old servants' quarters and bell pulls, or a famous person used to live there.

3) *Aesthetic value* is about ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place, such as appreciation of beauty or a sense of peace, tranquillity or awe.

4) *Communal value* comes from the relationship of groups of people with a place, or its place in their collective experience or memory. e.g. the building used to be a place of worship, a pub or social club, or had associations with a local industry.

This might seem complicated, but what it's really telling us is that heritage value is not just about whether a place looks old! It's about its story, what it tells us about the past, how it creates context and sense of place, and how it draws communities together. The nature, extent and level of importance of the features that make up a building's significance varies from building to building.

The nature of the significance indicates the best means of conserving your home – for example, if your house is significant because of specific architectural features it contains, conservation efforts will focus on preserving these features, not changing them.

How much historic interest your house holds can help you understand what sort of changes might be acceptable – is it the whole building that is significant or just part of it?

The level of importance says how protectively conservation policies will be applied. So if your house is listed, then it's likely that it will be more sensitive to change than a house that isn't.

The 'significance' questionnaire

If your home has heritage value, you will need to make a proposal to your council for any energy efficiency improvements or changes you'd like to make. To do this, you need to find out some information about your property's significance.

You can pay for somebody to come and do a survey, but we have included a questionnaire on the following pages so you can do it yourself! The questionnaire will help you find out what you need to know about the significance of your property.



This questionnaire was originally developed by Oxford City Council's conservation team as part of their HEET project. It's also available online at: www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/HeritageEnergyEfficiencyTool.htm

Part 1:

Historic and evidential value?

Historic value: Does your building connect us to past people, events and activities? For example does it illustrate aspects of daily life in the past, 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?



Miss Anne Harmsworth in an Interior by William Orpen

Qu 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?

Qu 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?

Qu 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 walls, including the pattern of window and door openings?	
Materials of the walls?	
Materials and style of the roof?	
Types/materials of windows?	
Type of door?	
Type and materials of gutters and downpipes?	
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? e.g:

Layout of rooms and connections?	
Style and materials of doors?	
Style and materials of floors?	
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?	

Qu 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 style are? (Use the guide to period architectural features on the HEET website if you aren't sure, or contact an architectural historian.)

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?	

Qu 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 centre of a historic city? (See sections 1.3 and 1.6 above)



Autumn afterglow by John Atkinson Grimshaw (1883)

Part 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 experience?

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.

Qu 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?	
Guttering/drainage?	
Floors?	
Its relationship to its surroundings?	
Other features?	

Qu 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? e.g. Decorative brickwork, stonework or carvings, stained glass panels in windows or doors, distinctive floor tiles in hallways, porches or other ground floor rooms.

If yes, what design features are particularly remarkable?

Qu 8

Is it part of a group of buildings that all have the same design or are designed to form a group? e.g. Is there a repeating decorative pattern brickwork on all the buildings in your street? Do they all have matching front doors? Is the layout of windows and doors such that they repeat, or mirror each other?

Qu 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?

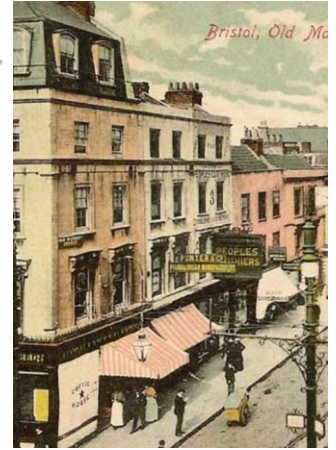
If yes, what features contribute to its appeal?

Part 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?

Few private houses are likely to have communal value, unless past inhabitants have influenced the lives of many people (e.g. it's the home of a famous religious leader, literary figure or iconic rock star), but many public buildings, institutions and places of work or entertainment are likely to have considerable value to the communities who use them.



Vintage postcard of Old Market, Bristol

Qu 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)?

Qu 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? E.g. A 'founding stone' that says when a building was established, and by whom – for instance: "these almshouses were built in 1794 by Henry Jones to house the poor widows of the parish"

Qu 12 Does the building include any elements that symbolise its role for the community who use it or are associated with it? E.g. it has a name like 'The Old School House' or 'The Old Post office' – it may still have a sign, a bell, or shop windows in the front.

Qu 13 Do any features of the building contribute to its spiritual or religious use, past or present? If yes, what are they?

STEP 3



Think about which energy efficiency improvements would be most appropriate

Now that you have thought about what is important about your home in a historic sense, you should have more of an idea about which energy efficiency improvements might undermine that significance, and which would be fine to install.

Improvements can be thought through in groups, relating to the parts of your home (walls, doors, windows etc). The lists below summarises the improvements you could make to each area, in order of those least likely to cause harm to the historic significance of your home, through to those where there is likely to be some harm.

WALLS

- Gap filling
- Internal solid wall insulation
- External solid wall insulation
- Insulating within the depth of a timber frame

CHIMNEYS

- Chimney blocking

DOORS

- Door draught-proofing
- Door refurbishment
- Creating a draught lobby
- High performance thermal doors

ROOFS

- Loft hatch insulation
- Loft insulation (where the loft is used only for storage and is unheated)
- Rafter insulation (where loft is in use or heated)
- Flat roof insulation

WINDOWS

- Thermal curtains and blinds
- Refurbishing or reinstating shutters
- Refurbishing and draught-proofing original windows
- Film secondary glazing
- Framed secondary glazing
- Replacing non-original windows or original windows damaged beyond repair with timber double glazing or slimline timber double glazing

FLOORS

- Gap filling and floor coverings
- Under floor insulation (suspended floor)
- Under floor insulation (solid floor)
- Under-floor heating
- Over-floor insulation



Lady Reading by a Window
by Thomas Benjamin Kennington
(c. 1900)

STEP 4



Weigh up any harm to historic significance against the benefits

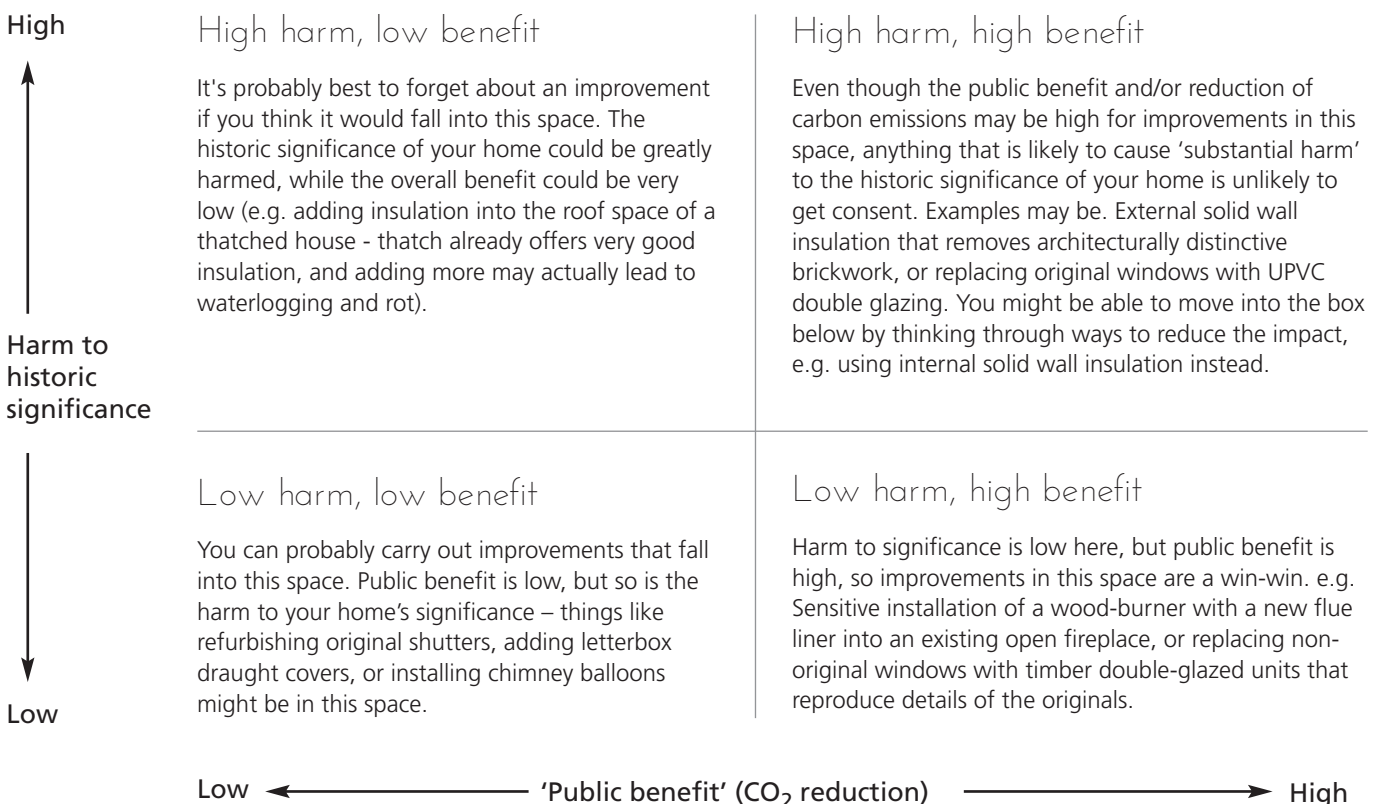
Now you need to weigh up the costs and benefits of what you'd like to do. If your planned improvements might cause some harm to the historical significance of your home, you will need to carefully weigh this up against the energy efficiency benefits.

If you need to get Listed Building Consent to carry out the works, this weighing-up process is a key part of the application you have to make, and it should help you decide what is and isn't worth applying for consent for (see the diagram below).

Bear in mind that, if your home is Listed or in a Conservation Area, it is the duty of the Local Authority to protect it, and they are required by planning laws to give 'great weight' to protecting the historic value of your home. But the local authority will also be interested in helping you to maximise the energy efficiency of your home.

When you apply to carry out alterations to a listed building, any harm would also be weighed against the public benefits of what you want to do. The public benefit of improving the energy efficiency of old homes is mostly tackling climate change by reducing carbon emissions.

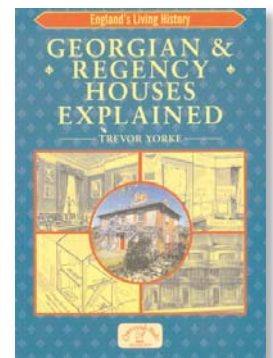
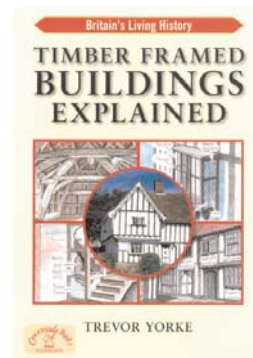
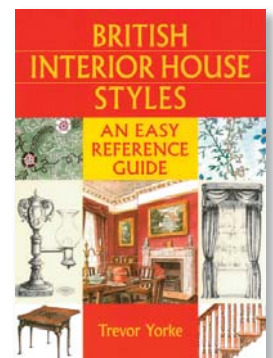
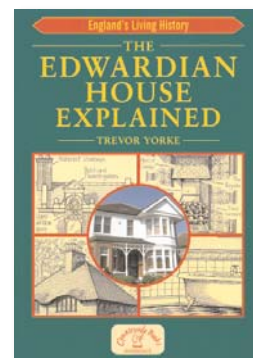
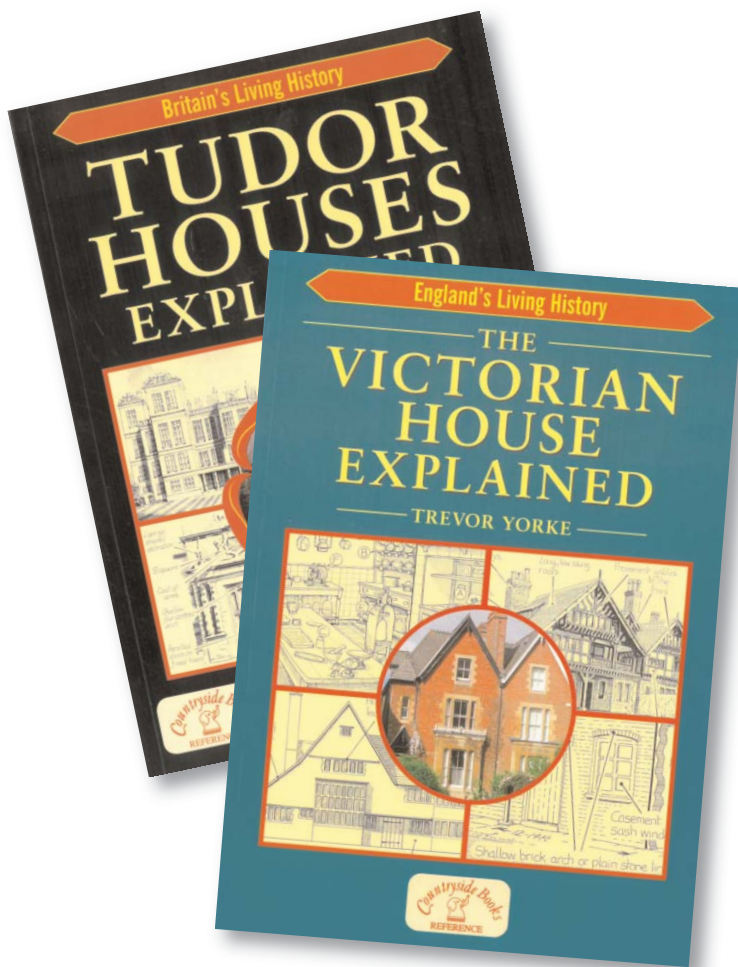
Where you think some harm to the historic significance of your home will occur, the key question is always the same: is there something simpler, less invasive, and more cost-effective that I can do first? Otherwise, there might well be ways to minimise the harm. Have a look at English Heritage's resources to help you with this: www.english-heritage.org.uk/your-home/saving-energy



FURTHER READING



For those who want to love their old home even more, we strongly recommend you pick up one of these short, useful and inexpensive books, written and illustrated by Trevor Yorke and published by Countryside Books. Available by mail order from www.countrysidebooks.co.uk



Clockwise from top left:

- British Interior House Styles (£6.95)
- The Edwardian House Explained (£7.99)
- Georgian & Regency Houses Explained (£8.99)
- The Victorian House Explained (£7.99)
- Timber Framed Buildings Explained (£6.99)
- Tudor Houses Explained (£4.99)



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The **Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE)** is a national charity that helps people change the way they think and act on energy.

Our **Home Energy Team** offers free advice on domestic energy use to householders in Bristol and Somerset (including the unitary authorities of North Somerset and Bath & North East Somerset).

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