

RESEARCH SHOWS SHORTCOMINGS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NPPF HERITAGE PROTECTION POLICIES



Two new research reports commissioned by Historic England highlight significant shortcomings in the implementation of the heritage policies of the NPPF that serve to safeguard the historic environment.

One study found that the inclusion of heritage assets does not appear to have a negative impact on the outcome of planning applications. Over 90% of the applications reviewed with a heritage dimension were granted planning permission: **heritage was not preventing development.**

A heritage statement was submitted with only 49% of the sample of planning applications with a heritage dimension, and as such the government policy requirement outlined in NPPF paragraph 128 that, *“local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting”* is not being met. The research found that a large proportion of the submitted heritage statements simply acknowledged or provided a basic description of the heritage asset/dimension but made no mention of significance or assessment of the impacts of the proposals.

The majority of heritage statements were included within Design and Access Statements, and many were potentially produced by non-heritage specialists, as there were obvious omissions such as consultation with the relevant Historic Environment Record and application of best practice guidance. Consideration of effects on the setting of heritage assets was identified as a particular weakness. However, when a standalone heritage report by a named heritage

specialist was submitted in support of an application with a heritage dimension, all researched examples were entirely compliant with all the policy requirements in the NPPF.

One of the reports recommended a new checklist of steps for complying with the NPPF when a planning application may affect designated heritage assets to address the generally unsatisfactory level of application of the NPPF heritage policies across England. The report recommends that Historic England supported by MHCLG and DDCMS publishes and promotes the checklist. Additionally, further clarification of what comprises ‘heritage assets’ would seem useful as confusion over what should be discussed in statements on heritage occurred frequently enough to indicate that this is an issue.

TOR heritage services have the expertise required to identify heritage assets, their significance and the likely impacts of proposed development. We have extensive experience of assisting developers in identifying archaeological and/or built heritage risks to facilitate successful allocations in the local plan process. **Planning policy, and now the findings of these reports, recognises heritage as part of the solution for long-term sustainable growth and not as a block on development.**

All our heritage assessments are informed by site visits early in the process that can serve to highlight constraints and enhancement opportunities. Added to this is our contention that early engagement with local authorities to help determine the focus of heritage assessments and ensure necessary information is provided for site allocations or robust planning applications.

If you need advice on any aspect of the historic environment, or how it may influence your application, please contact one of our specialists:

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