



## Chapter 2: Identifying the setting of heritage assets

## 2. Identifying the setting of heritage assets

### The aims of this chapter

- To define and explain the concept of the 'setting' of a heritage asset.
- To explain how the concept relates to national planning policy.
- To explain how to assess the setting of heritage assets when preparing a planning application.
- To explain how the council will assess the setting of heritage assets when determining planning applications.

### This chapter should be read in conjunction with:

- Understanding Significance – Chapter 4.
- Understanding Context – Chapter 6.
- Designing New Development – Chapter 7.
- English Heritage Guidance Document, 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (2011).
- 'Seeing the History in the View,' (2011) by English Heritage.

### The Definition of the 'Setting' of a Heritage Asset

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines 'setting' as: *"The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."*
- 2.2 The following guidance expands on the concepts encompassed in this definition. In reading this guidance, it is important to note that all heritage assets, both designated and non-designated, have a setting. Please note that as from 1st April 2015, English Heritage is to be reorganized and advice and guidance will be available from Historic England, not English Heritage in future
- 2.3 "The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced" – which means the physical environment around a heritage asset. This should not be taken just to mean the immediate space around the heritage asset, its curtilage or its next door neighbours, though these will in almost all cases form part of the setting.



*Ripon Cathedral, as experienced in two very different surroundings, but both forming part of its setting.*

- 2.4 The setting will include any views or vistas that the heritage asset forms part of; for example how the asset is seen in the landscape or as part of the vista along a street. If the heritage asset forms part of the skyline or horizon, then

anything that impacts the skyline or horizon is likely to affect the heritage asset's setting. If the heritage asset forms part of a formally designed landscape or space (such as Valley Gardens or the grounds of a country house), or part of a formal piece of urban design (such as Masham Market Square or the planned estate village at Nidd), any changes to the design or



*Two examples of formal design in the historic environment providing settings to numerous heritage assets – Masham Market Square (top), an historic form of urban design and Valley Gardens in Harrogate (bottom), a landscaped gardens in the heart of the town.*

character of that place would inevitably impact the setting of the heritage asset given the close historic and visual relationship between the heritage asset and the overall design of the place.

- 2.5 While the visual links between a heritage asset and its surroundings are important considerations for historical reasons, important elements of a heritage asset's setting may not be visible within its immediate surroundings. For example, the workers' cottages, gardeners' bothies, ice house or kennels serving a listed country house might well be hidden from view or be physically distant from the country house they are associated with. Nonetheless, they each contribute to our overall understanding and experience of the country house and would hence be considered to be part of its setting.
- 2.5 The use of the word "experienced" rather than "seen," in the definition of setting is important as the setting of heritage assets is affected by more than the physical layout and appearance of the spaces, buildings and structures around it. Setting will therefore in most cases extend beyond the curtilage of a listed building. The levels of noise, odours, dust, vibration and the overall sense of remoteness, tranquillity, 'wildness', serenity, or seclusion of a place can have a substantial bearing on the character of a heritage asset and govern how we experience it. Conversely, some heritage assets derive much of their character from the bustle and vibrancy of their setting and the interaction of the heritage asset with it. On this basis, where development affects more than an asset's visual or aesthetic qualities, such as by affecting noise or vibration levels, or bringing more activity into a tranquil backwater, there may be an impact on the setting of a heritage asset.
- 2.6 "Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve" – because each heritage asset is unique and the physical environment (the topography, the nature of neighbouring buildings and spaces) is different for each heritage asset, it is not possible to define the extent of setting using prescribed rules or formulas. In many cases the setting may only become identifiable through the study of the heritage asset and its surroundings and their evolution over time and surveying the heritage asset in both its immediate surroundings and in the wider townscape or landscape.
- 2.7 Very few heritage assets stand in settings that have not evolved or changed incrementally over time and therefore it is rare for a heritage asset's surroundings to be the same as when it was designed or erected. However, this does not necessarily mean that further change would not cause harm to the setting of the heritage asset.



*Wedderburn, a grade II listed house dating from the late 18th century, facing onto The Stray in Harrogate – once surrounded by woodland and gardens, now the modern houses lining Slingsby Walk dominate the setting as experienced from The Stray.*

- 2.8 Our understanding of a heritage asset is key. If we understand what is significant about the heritage asset (e.g. its historical interest or aesthetic interest), we can begin to understand how it related to its setting when it was built, how this has changed over time and hence what aspects of its setting are important to conserve. For each heritage, it is imperative to understand the particular reasons why it is where it is, why it has a particular character and appearance and why it interacts with its surroundings in the manner that it does. By gaining this understanding, decisions about changes to the setting of a heritage asset can be made in an informed manner. Such informed decision making is much more likely to result in proposals that limit harm to the significance of a heritage asset.
- 2.9 **“Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral”** – the setting of heritage assets may comprise many and varied components – the buildings and structures around a heritage asset

are erected, altered, extended, converted, demolished, or replaced. Trees and hedges sprout or are planted, grow, are maintained, left unmaintained, cut back, thinned, die or are removed. Highways are reordered, widened, controlled, altered, and lit. Farming activity and practice change according to market demand and/or legislation. At any given time these factors may each contribute in their own way to the overall setting of a heritage asset, either positively or negatively or in a neutral manner. It is necessary to understand the significance of the heritage asset in order to determine whether the impact is positive, negative or neutral.

- 2.10 For example, the setting to Knaresborough Castle comprises the survival of the historic street pattern, the grain of development on the narrow medieval burgage plots, the consistent building heights, the tightly enclosed nature of the streets and the on-going vibrancy and level of activity in the town centre. All of these elements might be regarded as positive aspects of the setting of the castle. However among this townscape there may be buildings or spaces that neither enhance nor detract from the setting of the castle. Such buildings and spaces would have a neutral impact on the setting. Arguably, this townscape also comprises buildings that are out of scale with surrounding buildings or do not follow the layout of burgage plots and spaces which detract from the character and layout of the area. Such buildings and spaces may have a negative impact on the setting of the castle.

### **The Setting of Heritage Assets and National Planning Policy**

- 2.11 The conservation of heritage assets requires a holistic approach in understanding how development may impact upon their significance. This approach has not always been taken and the impact of development on the setting of listed buildings did not become part of the listed building legislation until 1974, some 27 years after the first designation of a listed building. It was not until 1993 that the first government guidance was produced in order to advise local planning authorities on how to manage change within the setting of listed buildings.
- 2.12 However, the most recent central government policy and guidance, the NPPF, has made the setting of heritage assets a mainstream heritage issue. In considering proposals for development that affect a heritage asset, the NPPF requires that the council should assess the impact upon the significance of a heritage asset. This is because the setting of a heritage asset contributes to its significance. This is reflected in the NPPF’s definition of significance, as follows: *“The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because*



A 20th century apartment block, harmfully dominating the setting of the adjacent listed buildings.

*of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting." (NPPF Annex 2).*

- 2.13 The NPPF sets out how applicants should include an assessment of the impact on setting when providing supporting documentation with planning applications: *"In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their **setting**..."* (Paragraph 128).
- 2.14 It then follows that: *"Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including development affecting the **setting** of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of*

*a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal."* (Paragraph 129).

- 2.15 Further, that: *"When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation ... Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its **setting**. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification..."* (Paragraph 132).

- 2.16 And also, that: *"Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites and within the **setting** of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably."* (Paragraph 137).

- 2.17 The concept of setting also has relevance in the wider landscape, for example, in the Green Belt, where the NPPF includes the following as one of the five purposes of Green Belt land: *"to preserve the **setting** and special character of historic towns."* (Paragraph 80).



The countryside setting of Kirkby Overblow.

### How to Assess the Setting of a Heritage Asset

- 2.18 Sometimes the setting of a listed building can be readily understood. For example, the setting of a townhouse might simply be the streets and back streets that surround it, or the immediate environs of a conservation area can easily be defined as being part of its setting. For some assets, defining the setting might be more complex, particularly where they are components of an extensive landscape or townscape, or with assets like earthworks, where the setting may not be easily discernible. In these instances a suitably qualified and experienced professional should be involved.



*To fully understand the setting of a heritage asset, all aspects of that setting must be assessed. Goldsborough Hall is a good example as it has many aspects to its setting – such as, the immediate area surrounding the hall, incorporating the associated ancillary buildings (seen here in the above photo, as viewed within the village), the formal grounds immediately surrounding the hall and then also the wider surrounding landscape, both designed and natural.*

- 2.19 The council's Conservation and Design Team can only provide an assessment of a heritage asset's setting when a valid pre-application consultation or application has been submitted to the council.
- 2.20 In carrying out a survey, it is important to remember that understanding the heritage asset and its setting is likely to involve more than simply looking around the site. For example, if a high, dense hedge planted in the last 20 years blocks views to and from a heritage asset, it does not follow that the land on the other side of the hedge no longer forms part of the setting of the heritage asset. This area might have important historical and aesthetic associations with the heritage asset that make it part of the setting.

- 2.21 The applicant, agent, or heritage consultant acting on the applicant's behalf should be able to provide an assessment by using the steps outlined in English Heritage's guidance 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (2011). This document provides a (non-exhaustive) checklist of potential attributes of a setting that may help to elucidate its contribution to significance, which may usefully be expressed in terms of its heritage values. Only a limited selection of the attributes listed is likely to be particularly important to any single asset, or any particular type.

### **How the Council Assesses the Impact of a Development Proposal on the Setting of a Heritage Asset**

- 2.22 The council will use the advice within this guidance document and the guidance within English Heritage's 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (or any subsequent replacement documents to the English Heritage guidance).