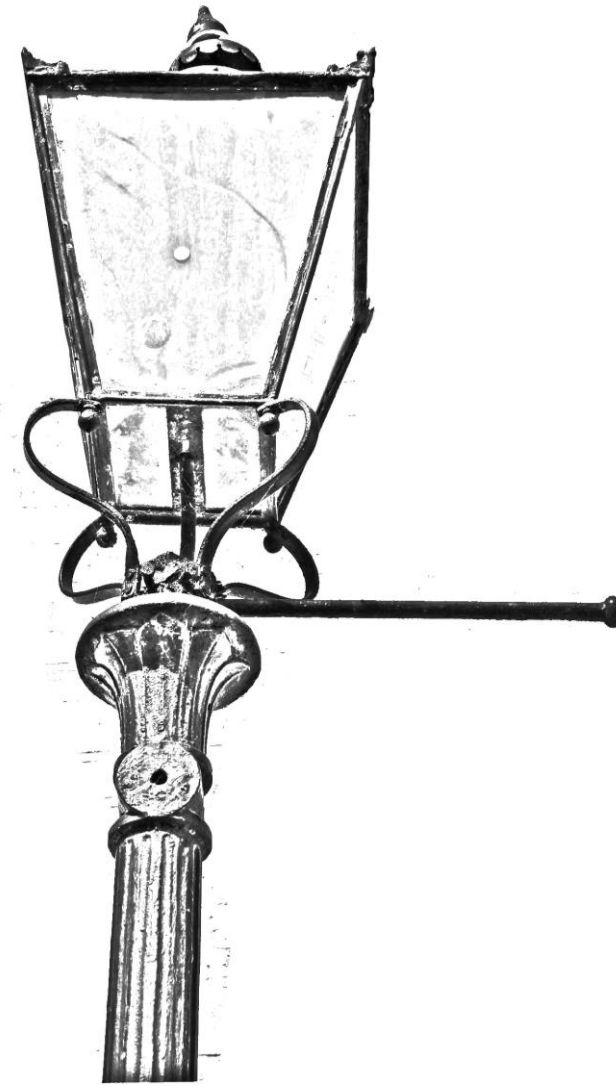


South Benfleet Conservation Area Design Code



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1. Introduction

1.1. Scope of the Design Code

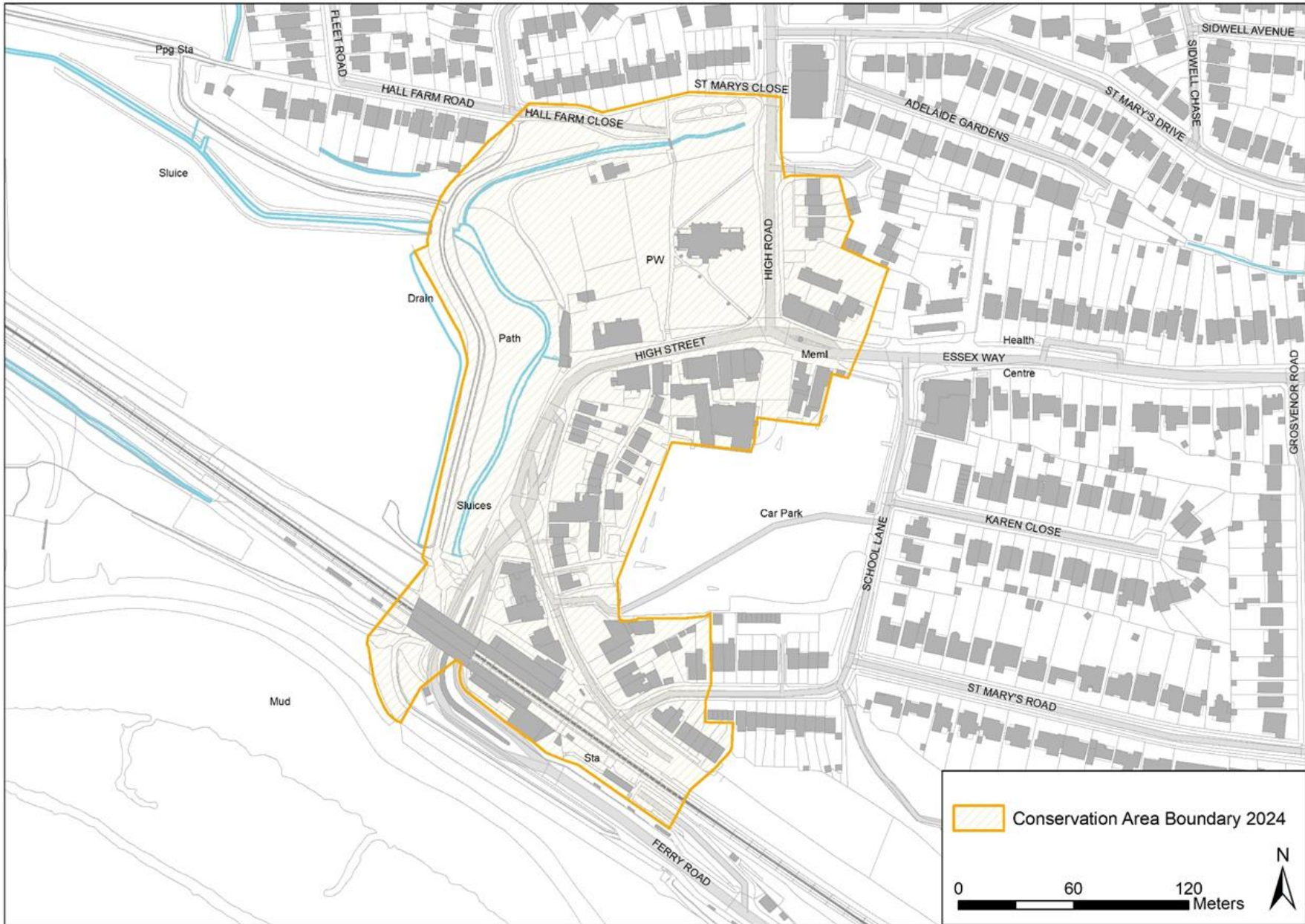
This document is for building owners, developers and decision-makers with an interest in the South Benfleet Conservation Area to help with the preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of the area, and to ensure its special architectural and historic interest is conserved. Where planning applications are submitted for changes to buildings, the redevelopment of sites and new developments within the Conservation Area, they must adhere to the principles set out within this document.

The objective of this Design Code is to conserve the Conservation Area's architectural and historic interest and to improve the built environment for residents and visitors to the area.

Surviving architectural features of interest within individual buildings, whether original or historically appropriate, are important elements of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The Council will seek to retain these features, will support efforts to reinstate lost features and welcome proposals that better reveal or enhance the significance of the Conservation Area. Proposals which have the potential to adversely affect the character or appearance of the Conservation Area will not be supported. The Council will achieve these aims through the planning process and by removing, where necessary, permitted development rights (as per the Article 4 Direction). This gives the Council a level of control over changes within the Conservation Area.

1.2. Baseline Assessment

The baseline of the Design Code is provided by the South Benfleet Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (2024), which provides an understanding and assessment of the Conservation Area's significance, including its historic development and the contribution made by its buildings and open spaces. The local building types, architectural styles, materials, detailing and landscaping all contribute to the character and appearance of South Benfleet Conservation Area, and form the basis for this Design Code.



2. Design Code

2.1. Infill developments and the redevelopment of opportunity sites

South Benfleet Conservation Area has a very limited number of opportunity sites for infill development. In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (paragraph 212), the Council should look for new developments on these sites to enhance or better reveal the significance of the Conservation Area. The National Model Design Code Guidance Notes¹ states,

'Well-designed development adds a new layer to the history of a site while enhancing and respecting its past, with the expectation that new development will be valued for its heritage in the future as heritage assets are today.'

In this regard, an understanding of the context, history and character of an area must influence the siting and design of new development. Any new development within the Conservation Area should adhere to the following guidance.

The Conservation Area Character Appraisal has identified three buildings (Section 7.2) within the Conservation Area which are considered to make a negative contribution to the significance of the area, and which could be altered or redeveloped to make a positive contribution.

¹ National Model Design Code Part 2 Guidance Notes, 2021, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Development Type

Residential and mixed commercial developments are appropriate within South Benfleet Conservation Area. Both the opportunity sites identified in the Section 7.2 of the Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2024) would benefit from high quality developments.

Building positioning and orientation

Building lines are generally consistent. Buildings are predominantly positioned at the back of the pavement with their principal elevations fronting onto the street. Therefore, it is important that any new development maintains this relationship with the street and follows the established building line.

Building form and scale

Any new development should reflect the prevailing building height of the area, particularly the scale of the adjacent properties. Generally, two-storey buildings with traditional roof forms would respect the prevailing character of the area. New developments should also respect the narrow historic plot sizes to ensure the grain of the area is preserved.

Elevational treatment and detailing

The articulation in the principal elevations, such as the bay rhythm and the positioning and scale of openings, should also reflect the

prevailing historic built form. Historic buildings within the Conservation Area largely have a regular bay rhythm with apertures of vertical (sash window) or horizontal (casement window) proportions. The ratio of wall to window is an important consideration, with historic buildings having a well-proportioned balance between walls and windows which should be continued in new development.

Materials

The prevailing traditional material palette of the Conservation Area should be reflected in any new development. Traditional and handmade materials of a high quality contribute to the area's character and appearance by providing natural variations in texture and colour.

Plain red clay tiles and natural slates are appropriate materials for roofs, with timber bargeboards and fascias or open tiled verges. The predominant elevation materials of buildings within the Conservation Area are soft red brick, yellow stock brick, pale-coloured render or timber featheredged weatherboarding, and these should be reflected in any new development.

New development should reflect the quality and craftsmanship of traditional timber windows and doors. Both sash and casement windows are features of the Conservation Area. The detailing of surviving historic windows should be replicated including integral glazing bars, no or concealed trickle vents, and flush fitting frames (for casement windows).

Landscaping and boundary treatments

Front gardens and areas of landscaping contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area. Whilst there are examples, particularly commercial properties, of buildings positioned at the back of pavement, it could be appropriate for new residential development to incorporate small front gardens with front boundary treatments of low brick walls. Timber picket fences may also be appropriate.

2.2. Alterations and extensions to existing buildings

Roof alterations (dormers, rooflights, chimneys)

South Benfleet Conservation Area generally features traditional roofscapes free from unsympathetic modern interventions like box dormers and rooflights. The retention and maintenance of traditional roof forms and coverings (clay tile and natural slate, for example) is encouraged. To preserve the character and appearance of the area, large dormers, box dormers and prominently positioned rooflights on front elevations would not be supported.

Alterations to the roof form, for example, the conversion from a hipped to a gabled roof or increases in ridge height to provide for loft conversions, are also inappropriate.

Where opportunities arise, concrete tiles on historic buildings should be replaced with more traditional materials including plain clay tiles or natural slates, to better reflect the historic roofscape of the area.

Property owners are generally encouraged to repair and maintain roofs in good order. Broken, damaged or loose tiles and blocked guttering and other rainwater goods should be a priority for repair and maintenance.

Chimney stacks are an important element of the traditional roofscapes within the Conservation Area. Removal of chimney stacks or reductions in height would not be supported. Traditional clay chimney pots and lead flashing should also be maintained.

Walls (painting, rendering, cladding)

The external walls of buildings should be well maintained and finished with render, brick or clad in high quality featheredged timber weatherboard. Where there is existing exposed brickwork, this should not be covered with render or weatherboarding.

Where buildings are constructed in soft red bricks or are of traditional construction, repointing should be in an appropriate lime mortar and with a pointing profile to match the original finish (usually a flush profile).

In most cases it is appropriate for new extensions to match the material of the host building. Where new brick walls are being constructed, they should match the colour, texture, brick bond, detailing and pointing profile of the original brickwork.

Windows and doors

Historically all buildings within the Conservation Area had single-glazed timber windows. Many historic windows across the Conservation Area have been replaced with uPVC double-glazed units due to the desire to improve energy efficiency and reduce

cyclical maintenance. Unfortunately, these are of a poor material quality and usually have significantly thicker frames and surface mounted glazing bars, poorly imitating the profiles of traditional windows. uPVC windows also fail to exhibit the craftsmanship of traditional timber windows and do not have the same material authenticity which contributes to the architectural interest of individual buildings and the Conservation Area as a whole.

Existing traditional timber-framed windows should be maintained and repaired wherever possible. Proposals to replace historic or traditional windows should be supported by a condition survey from a suitably qualified and experienced surveyor. Where justified, the replacement of historic or traditional windows should be timber and designed on a like-for-like basis. Unsympathetic uPVC windows should be replaced with timber windows of a traditional design, to complement the character and appearance of the property and the local area. If well-detailed, slim double-glazing can be incorporated into new and existing timber windows.

Top hung and tilt and turn windows would not be supported.

Further detail on the repair and replacement of traditional windows can be found in the Historic England guidance [Traditional Windows: Their Care, Repair and Upgrading](#) (2017).

Architectural details

Surviving architectural details such as decorative brickwork, string courses, eaves details, cornices and bargeboards etc. should be conserved, maintained and repaired on a like-for-like basis.

Where new extensions are proposed, it may be appropriate to replicate some of the architectural details of the host building.

Porches

Porches are not a characteristic feature of South Benfleet Conservation Area. Porches may not be appropriate on historic buildings if they obscure architectural details including decorative door surrounds or brick details. However, if a porch were considered to be an acceptable addition it should be modest in scale, constructed in traditional materials to harmonise with the host building and should have a traditional pitched or lean-to roof.

Extensions (form and scale, elevational treatment)

Extensions should always be sympathetic to the scale, form and materials of the host building to ensure they harmonise with their surroundings. Extensions should be subservient in appearance, and this is often best achieved by ensuring the dimensions do not compete with the host dwelling. This could entail ensuring the height of a two storey extension is lower than the existing two storey building, or ensuring a single storey extension does not span the entire width of a rear elevation.

There may be opportunities for some elements of contemporary design and detailing but the overall form and proportions of any extensions should remain traditional to avoid competing architectural styles.

Sustainability

Climate change and renewable energy are growing considerations around change in the built environment. Some forms of renewable energy are less compatible with conservation areas if they are unsympathetically designed or positioned in prominent locations.

Solar panels are often not appropriate on front facing roof slopes and should be positioned on rear roof slopes or in roof valleys, or on the roofs of rear outbuildings. Ground-mounted solar panels in rear gardens also have less visual impact.

Other renewable energy sources, such as air source heat pumps, should also be positioned to the rears of buildings.

When retrofitting buildings within the Conservation Area, a holistic 'whole building' approach should be adopted to consider all of the aspects of the building fabric. Buildings firstly should be maintained to a high standard, including repairing timber windows to ensure they are not causing draughts. Internal insulation will not impact the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, but consideration should be given to the compatibility of insulation with historic buildings; any insulation should be vapour permeable. External insulation will not be acceptable on historic brick buildings and may not be appropriate for historic rendered or weatherboarded buildings due to the alterations needed to openings and eaves detailing.

Secondary glazing allows historic and traditional windows to be preserved whilst improving energy efficiency. Well-detailed slim double glazing can be accommodated within some historic timber windows (where there will not be a loss of historic glazing), and new timber windows can be double-glazed. uPVC double-glazing is not a sympathetic alternative and will not be supported.

Historic England have produced a suite of guidance documents regarding energy efficiency and historic buildings, and these should be consulted where relevant:

- Historic England Advice Note 14: *Energy Efficiency and Traditional Homes (2020)*
- Historic England, *Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: How to Improve Energy Efficiency (2018)*
- Historic England, *Traditional Windows: their care, repair and upgrading (2017)*

Further guidance on climate change and energy efficiency in relation to the historic environment are available on the Essex Design Guide website at this [link](#).

Front Gardens and Boundary treatments

Existing front gardens and boundary walls should be retained. Removal of front gardens and boundary walls to provide for off-street car parking will be resisted. Reinstatement of lost front gardens and front boundary walls is encouraged. Low brick walls and timber picket fences are encouraged for front boundary treatments. Close boarded fences with concrete posts do not complement the character of the Conservation Area and should be avoided.

2.3.Shopfronts and signage

General principles

Shop fronts are not commonplace within the Conservation Area, but where they are present, they have a prominent place within the streetscene. There are a variety of designs, with few examples of historic shopfronts surviving.

Well designed and maintained shopfronts is encouraged; the replacement of incongruous shopfronts and associated signage provides an important opportunity to revitalise and enhance the streetscene. The replacement of full height windows and a rationalisation of signage in particular could have a quick and notable effect on a streetscene, improving the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

When designing replacement shopfronts, the characteristics of the

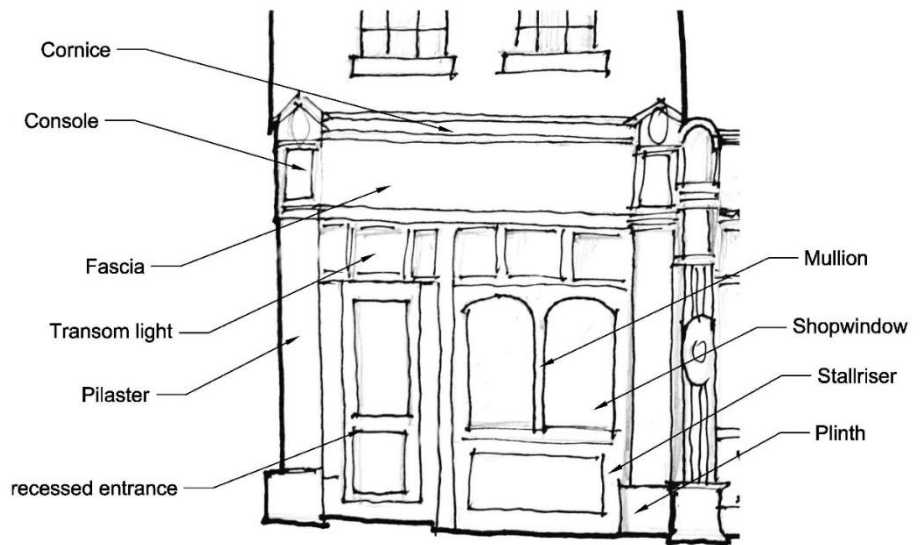


Figure 1: Elements of a traditional shopfront

host building as well as the streetscene should be taken into consideration. Care should be taken to ensure that all windows, doors and fascias are proportionate to the host building.

The installation of traditional architectural features such as stallrisers, cornices, consoles and decorative tiling should be

considered as part of any replacement shopfront. These features are illustrated in Figure 1, yet may not be appropriate on all buildings.

Signage and fascia boards are often the most prominent part of any shopfront, meaning great care should be taken with their design. The colour, font, size and appearance of all branding can have a positive or negative effect, and should therefore be well considered. Overly large or dominant signage should be avoided, and all font sizes should be proportionate to the building. Enlarged or cramped typeface should not be supported; the use of individual cast metal lettering or painted traditional sign writing is encouraged.

The excessive addition of advertisement displays should be avoided and signs above ground floor level are often not appropriate. Hanging signs should be carefully considered but can provide additional opportunities for advertising and wayfinding.

Internally illuminated signage is not appropriate. The use of downward pointing trough lights to illuminate fascia boards may be acceptable, however lighting should be kept to a minimum.

2.4. Public open spaces and street furniture

Public open spaces and street furniture are important elements of the Conservation Area's overall character and appearance. New or replacement paving, furniture and other elements of the streetscape should be chosen to enhance the quality of the environment and complement surrounding buildings.

Excavation of paving for service-related works should be made good and the infilling should match the surface material and colour.

Different materials and sizes of kerb stones should not be used when repairing the pavements.

Street lighting should be consistent in design, height, materiality and colour. Cast iron columns with traditional lamp units are appropriate in South Benfleet; the installation of utilitarian steel or concrete lampposts is not appropriate.

A consistent and holistic approach should be used for all changes to street furniture, including the installation of new items. Care should be taken to ensure there is not an over proliferation of street furniture, which can lead to visual clutter. The use of traditional materials and designs should be considered for all new and replacement items, as this would reflect the character of the building stock and enhance the overall appearance of the area.

3. Additional resources

3.1. Historic England guidance

Additional guidance to help owners of historic houses in making decisions about the maintenance, repair and alteration of their homes is provided in the advice section of Historic England's website. The page entitled 'Your Home' provides links to guidance regarding making changes to historic homes, including what permission might be required to make changes to historic homes, and general principles and advice on the most common types of alterations. Other pages in this section include one entitled 'Owning an Older Home', which provides access to guidance on living in a conservation area, and 'Looking After Your Home', which contains links to advice on maintenance and repair.

Further guidance is provided in the following Advice Notes.

- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Draught-proofing windows and doors](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Early cavity walls](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: How to Improve Energy Efficiency](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating flat roofs](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating pitched roofs at ceiling level - cold roofs](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating pitched roofs at rafter level-warm roofs](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating solid ground floors](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating solid walls](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulation of suspended timber floors](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Open fires, chimneys and flues](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Secondary glazing for windows](#)
- [Energy Efficiency and Traditional Homes: Historic England Advice Note 14](#)
- [Guide for Owners of Listed Buildings](#)
- [Heat Pumps in Historic Buildings \(Air Source Heat Pump Case Studies – Small-scale Buildings\)](#)
- [Listed Building Consent: Historic England Advice Note 16](#)
- [Making Changes to Heritage Assets: Historic England Advice Note 2](#)
- [Repointing Brick and Stone Walls](#)

- Statements of Heritage Significance: Historic England Advice Note 12
- Traditional Windows: their care, repair and upgrading