

# Historic England Advisory Note on the Reconstruction of Heritage Assets

HO-J Post Consultation Draft 081216

## 1. Introduction

1.1 In certain circumstances there may be a need or desire to reconstruct heritage assets. If this work is to deliver the maximum public benefit it is important to all interested parties, particularly local communities, that the reasons for reconstruction are clearly articulated and that the work is very carefully considered, planned and delivered. If this is not done there is risk that the assets will be recreated in a form in which they never existed and which undermines our ability to understand and appreciate our past.

1.2 It is many years since English Heritage, Historic England's predecessor, provided guidance on the reconstruction of heritage assets. English Heritage's *Policy Statement on Restoration, Reconstruction, and Speculative Recreation of Archaeological Sites including Ruins* was published in 2001. Parts of the statement have been incorporated in more summary form in this advisory note. *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (hereafter *Conservation Principles*) dates from 2008 and it is anticipated that the review of the sections of this document on the related topics of restoration, new work and alteration will be informed by this advisory note on reconstruction. Historic England Advice Note 2 *Making Changes to Heritage Assets* was published in February 2016. The note contains sections on restoration, additions and alterations, relevant elements of which have been included here, sometimes in slightly modified form to reflect the differences between restoration and reconstruction as defined in section 2 below.

1.3 Historic England is the government's advisor on the historic environment of England. Where the UK Government has ratified international heritage conventions, Historic England is also the adviser on their implementation and on meeting the obligations that flow from them. There is therefore an international as well as national component to the advice we provide to government. The devolved administrations within the UK have their own sources of heritage advice and, while this guidance has much in common with policy and practice in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, it is specific to England and the wider international dimension noted above.

1.4 There is a renewed interest in reconstruction as a result of natural disasters such as the 2015 earthquake in Nepal and the destruction of significant archaeological and historic sites

in Iraq and Syria. In response the UK Government has established the Cultural Protection Fund to “foster, safeguard and promote cultural heritage in conflict-afflicted regions”. While an English approach will not always be applicable elsewhere, there are some aspects of this guidance, particularly in section 4, that may nevertheless help to inform decisions on proposals made to the Cultural Protection Fund involving reconstruction.

1.5 The updating of Historic England’s approach to reconstruction has taken account of some significant factors that have emerged since *Conservation Principles* were published in 2008. These include advances in digital technology, which allow for more accurate and comprehensive data about heritage assets to be recorded, and the recognition that the communal values which are described in *Conservation Principles* are regarded as even more important now than they were in 2008. For example UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee places increasing weight on community participation and engagement in all aspects of cultural and natural heritage. This emphasis does however raise issues about the range of communities involved and how best to resolve differences of view that may be held by different communities and sometimes within an individual community.

1.6 It is hoped that this note, in particular the guidance provided in Section 4, will be of interest to a wide range of communities which own and/or care for their heritage and to decision makers in local and national government and their advisers. Historic England will use this guidance when advising decision takers in England on proposals involving the reconstruction of heritage assets. The guidance may also contribute to the continuing development of approaches to the reconstruction of heritage assets by the international cultural heritage community.

## 2. Definitions

2.1 The definition of the terms reconstruction and restoration set out in [the Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance \(the Burra Charter\)](#), (current edition 2013) are widely accepted and are used here.

**Reconstruction:** *Returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material into the fabric .*

**Restoration:** *Restoration means returning a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing elements without the introduction of new material.*

2.2 In addition to these Burra Charter terms other words are sometimes used. For the purposes of this document **re-creation** is defined as *the speculative in situ creation of a presumed earlier state on the basis of surviving evidence from that place and other sites and on deductions drawn from that evidence, using new materials.* **Replication** - *the construction of a copy of a structure or building, usually on another site* - is a related, but separate issue which is not dealt with in detail here.

2.3 In practice there are relatively few instances where *no* new material is added during a programme of restoration: fresh mortar and plaster for example may be needed to restore what was there before. The key difference between reconstruction and restoration is arguably one of degree, with reconstruction involving more extensive new build than a conservative programme of restoration.

### 3. Context

3.1 Since the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings published its manifesto in 1877, the management of ancient monuments and historic buildings in the England has generally, but not exclusively, been based on a philosophy that has conservation rather than reconstruction or restoration at its heart, and where new build is consciously of its own time and understandable as such. As a result, and although there has been a pattern of low key restoration, there are generally fewer examples in the England of the type of extensive restoration and reconstruction work undertaken by, for example, Viollet-le-Duc in 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

3.2 This conservative approach emerged in England, at least in part, as a result of trial and error and became formalised over time in government policy, for example Annex C.6 of Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 published in England in 1994. This approach is very much in line with the 1964 Venice Charter, which takes a conservative approach to reconstruction and restoration, saying that it should stop at the point at which conjecture begins. This concept has been tempered by the concept of relative significance that is enshrined in current planning guidance in England, which recognises that not all parts of a heritage asset are of equal value in understanding its history and development, and that change which conserves or enhances the most significant elements, while allowing the loss of components that do not contribute to significance, is desirable. There remains in English policy and practice a well-founded resistance to the type of restoration work which removes "accretions" at the cost of understanding, and to reconstruction work that is based on insufficient evidence to have credibility.

3.3 However there may be convincing reasons to undertake reconstruction in certain circumstances. In recent conflicts, where heritage assets which are of cultural significance have been deliberately destroyed, this represents an attack on the cultural values of the communities for which they have significance. Reconstruction can be a powerful symbol of renewal in populations which have been ravaged by recent conflict. For example the destruction in the 1990s of the historic bridge at Mostar during the conflict in what is now Bosnia Herzegovina was a huge blow to the resident communities and its reconstruction was very significant. As UNESCO says of this World Heritage Site: "*The Old Bridge area, with its pre-Ottoman, eastern Ottoman, Mediterranean and western European architectural features, is an outstanding example of a multicultural urban settlement. The reconstructed*

*Old Bridge and Old City of Mostar is a symbol of reconciliation, international co-operation and of the coexistence of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious communities."*

3.4 Communal values are also inherent in, for example, the reconstruction of the Sinhalese Buddhist Temple of the Tooth Relic in Sri Lanka, following its deliberate destruction in 1998. The director of the reconstruction project has set out his view that it is "the impact on identity that underlies the argument for and justifies a physical restoration of tangible heritage at the recovery stage" [http://www.iccrom.org/ifrcdn/pdf/ICCROM\\_ICSo6\\_CulturalHeritagePostwar\\_en.pdf](http://www.iccrom.org/ifrcdn/pdf/ICCROM_ICSo6_CulturalHeritagePostwar_en.pdf) , page 88. There are, unfortunately, other examples from many parts of the world of the deliberate destruction of cultural property. Reconstruction was undertaken following World War II and more recently at St Ehelburga's church in the city of London, following a nearby terrorist bomb attack. While natural disasters may lack the pernicious element of deliberate destruction, it is the same issue of impact on identity that lends weight to reconstruction initiatives. Likewise within England heritage assets which have been severely damaged by accident have sometimes been the subject of reconstruction and restoration programmes, for example after the fire which devastated the late 17<sup>th</sup> century mansion at Uppark, Sussex.

3.5 In England decisions about whether or not to reconstruct heritage assets are usually taken on the basis of the significance of the damaged structure as well as more utilitarian considerations such as re-usability of the remains or accessibility of funds. Highly graded listed buildings damaged by fire, such as Uppark, are felt to merit high levels of investment in reconstruction, which may not be case with structures of less significance. However where significance is vested in extensive areas, for example historic townscapes, restoration and in some cases reconstruction of architectural features such as traditional windows and doors and the re-creation of the public realm can not only enhance heritage values, but also bring significant environmental, social and economic benefits. Although some of the international conventions referred to here have been developed from experience with an individual building or monument, many of the principles and the guidance in section 4 below, can be applied equally to geographically more extensive heritage assets.

3.6 Once reconstructed, heritage assets and places can have high levels of significance in their own right, ensuring the circumstances that resulted in the destruction of the original place are not forgotten and that the "new" heritage asset acts as a symbol of renewal and reconciliation. Warsaw's inscription as a World Heritage Site recognises this; part of the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/30> says: "*Warsaw was deliberately annihilated in 1944 as a repression of the Polish resistance to the Nazi German occupation. The capital city was reduced to ruins with the intention of obliterating the centuries-old tradition of Polish statehood. The rebuilding of the historic city, 85% of which was destroyed, was the result of the determination of the inhabitants and the support of the*

*whole nation. The reconstruction of the Old Town in its historic urban and architectural form was the manifestation of the care and attention taken to assure the survival of one of the most important testimonials of Polish culture. The city was rebuilt as a symbol of elective authority and tolerance, where the first democratic European constitution, the Constitution of 3 May 1791, was adopted."*

3.7 Such reconstructions need to be based on clear and sufficient evidence if they are to be fully meaningful and should avoid the creation of something that never existed in that form in the first place. While there has been successful reconstruction where this principle has not been followed fully (including in Warsaw), the concept of authenticity is now essential to any consideration of reconstruction. In this respect the *Nara Document on Authenticity* published by ICOMOS in 1994 <http://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf> is of particular relevance. Amongst other things, the document recognizes that "*responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it.*" At the same time there is recognition that "*the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all.*"

3.8 The *Nara Document* suggests that "*in cases where cultural values appear to be in conflict, respect for cultural diversity demands acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties.*" It goes on to note that "*authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. The use of these sources permits elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined.*"

3.9 This is of particular relevance to decisions about reconstruction, where the cultural values of all parties should be taken into account, and where intangible as well as tangible values are of particular relevance. In this way, going back to the two examples given above, the *Nara Document* reflects the judgements that were made in the reconstruction of Warsaw and supports the decision to reconstruct the Temple of the Tooth Relic. The *Nara Document* also makes it clear that there should be respect for diverse cultural and heritage values and there should be "*conscious efforts to avoid imposing mechanistic formulae or standardized procedures in attempting to define or determine authenticity of particular monuments and sites.*"

3.10 Notwithstanding the helpful policies in the *Nara Document* the range of different communities that can be involved in decisions on reconstruction and the diversity of their views can make it difficult to achieve consensual decisions on reconstruction. Indeed a range of differing approaches can often be evident within an individual community. There are also wider communities of interest that may not be local to the heritage in question but which have a legitimate interest in it. The Council of Europe's Faro Declaration (2005)

adopts abroad definition of a heritage community, which “consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations”. In England there are provisions in the planning system for consultation with Historic England on some categories of works. Historic England’s views are likely to reflect national guidance and international charters and conventions, which may sometimes find less favour in community groups more immediate to the heritage asset. In contentious cases it is important that processes are in place that allow for the engagement of the full range of communities so that the decision maker is aware of all their views and can place appropriate weight on them in reaching a decision.

3.11 The Riga Charter <http://www.halles-altes-rathaus.de/de/aktuelles?p59%5Buid%5D=%7B2e6539fc-9b5d-0e2e-5137-feffe432939b%7D> dating from 2000 goes in to additional detail about the principles of reconstruction, which are very much in line with Nara. In particular Riga makes it clear that “*replication of cultural heritage is in general a misrepresentation of evidence of the past, and that each architectural work should reflect the time of its own creation, in the belief that sympathetic new buildings can maintain the environmental context, but that in exceptional circumstances, reconstruction of cultural heritage, lost through disaster, whether of natural or human origin, may be acceptable...*” This firm line is also evident in the *Operational Guidelines for the Interpretation of the World Heritage Convention*, which the UK government has ratified. Paragraph 86 says: “*in relation to authenticity, the reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances. Reconstruction is acceptable only on the basis of complete and detailed documentation and to no extent on conjecture.*”

3.12 The concept of authenticity also applies to the materials and craft processes used in reconstruction. Depending on the context, the term ‘authentic’ can refer to the use of materials and methods that are similar to those used to produce the original, or to the re-creation of its intended appearance. In many cases, traditional forms of construction appropriate to the cultural context of a place will be the preferred option. However, in practice, the choice of materials and construction methods may be constrained by factors such as the availability of the necessary materials and skills and sometimes by cost. Further considerations might include the need to comply with building codes, or to increase the resilience of a reconstruction to future threats (e.g. fire/flood/earthquake).

3.13 Authenticity also has a bearing in cases where a heritage asset that has been damaged comprised construction of several different periods and in some cases of different cultures, sometimes including past reconstruction. If there is a good record of this physical evidence then reconstruction firmly rooted in authenticity could be undertaken. But should all the components of a multi-phase asset be faithfully reconstructed or should relative

significance be taken into account? There may also be cases where previous phases of work have been structurally defective or where past re-creation work has resulted in fabric that does not reflect what was there before, but which reflects the thinking of the era in which it was re-created. In such instances a full understanding of how the place developed and the clear definition of its conservation values and significance can be used to provide evidence and the rationale for decisions on the approach to be taken.

3.14 While the principles of the various charters and documents referred to above can be applied to archaeological remains, more specific guidance is offered by the 1990 ICOMOS Lausanne Charter [http://www.icomos.org/charters/arch\\_e.pdf](http://www.icomos.org/charters/arch_e.pdf) . The final paragraph of Article 7 says: “reconstructions serve two important functions: experimental research and interpretation. They should, however, be carried out with great caution, so as to avoid disturbing any surviving archaeological evidence, and they should take account of evidence from all sources in order to achieve authenticity. Where possible and appropriate, reconstructions should not be built immediately on the archaeological remains, and should be identifiable as such.” The latter point is perhaps open to debate as replication in a different location from the original asset divorces it from its original context and the rationale for its original location can be lost. If reconstruction in situ can be achieved without harm to surviving physical fabric and/or archaeological remains then it may be possible to justify in some individual cases.

3.15 International charters and documents, as well as domestic publications such as Historic England’s *Conservation Principles*, place great weight on having accurate evidence on which to base reconstruction. The recent exponential growth of digital recording technologies offers great opportunities for significant places to be recorded comprehensively in an increasingly cost effective way. Evidence recorded through Building Information Management systems and by unmanned aerial vehicles can now produce and utilise effectively a level of information that was unimaginable even a few years ago. The potential to identify heritage assets at high risk of destruction and to record them accurately is significant, and offers the opportunity to make detailed records to inform subsequent reconstruction, should destruction prove unavoidable.

3.16 Even with the high levels of information that can be available, there will be occasions when reconstruction is unlikely to be appropriate. This applies particularly in the case of places whose primary value is evidential. As defined in *Conservation Principles* evidential value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity. In places where significance is vested mainly in evidential value, the weight attached to historic fabric or archaeological evidence is such that it may not be appropriate to undertake reconstruction work that would disturb or conceal it so that it is unavailable for study.

3.17 Reconstructing a heritage asset has value as a learning experience in addition to the benefits to the asset itself. The knowledge gained can help us to understand more about how the asset was originally constructed and changed over time and add to our understanding of its significance. In addition the practical knowledge gained of construction problems and solutions can help with the success of future projects. Ensuring that new knowledge is shared widely and that a good record of is kept of reconstruction initiatives is therefore an important element of any such project.

3.18 It should be emphasised that the potential to reconstruct heritage assets or to create comprehensive digital records should never be used as a justification for demolition or for allowing physical fabric to fall in to disrepair.

#### **4. Historic England Advice**

Historic England advises that the factors listed below should be taken into account in deciding whether or not to reconstruct heritage assets and in determining how reconstruction work should be carried out and documented.

- The record of the asset prior to damage or destruction should be good enough to enable accurate reconstruction rather than speculative re-creation
- The relative significance of the elements proposed for reconstruction, including their evidential value, should be fully understood and, if reconstruction will cause harm to surviving fabric and/or archaeological remains, the significance of the whole and of the elements that would be restored should decisively outweigh the significance of those that would be lost
- In places whose primary significance is vested in their evidential value consideration should be given to whether reconstruction would damage or conceal historic fabric or archaeological remains such as to make them unavailable for future research
- It should be possible to distinguish the reconstructed elements from any physical fabric and/or archaeological remains that have survived from before the damage occurred or, if destruction is total, to make clear that the asset is a reconstruction
- Such a distinction should usually be made discreetly and subtly rather than overtly
- Where the form in which the heritage asset currently exists is the result of a significant historical event, reconstruction should not harm the ability to understand this event. The significance of an historical event may be so great that consolidation as found may be more appropriate than reconstruction
- The work proposed should respect previous forms of the heritage asset

- Decisions on reconstruction should be taken primarily by the communities that created the heritage asset (where they still exist) and/or the communities that now care for the asset.
- If there is a conflict between the aspirations of communities that care for heritage assets and the principles set out in UK policy and guidance and/or widely accepted international guidance, a solution should be sought based on respect for the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties with a recognised interest
- Materials and methods of construction should be selected on the basis of conservation planning and values based assessment so that they reflect and embody the cultural heritage values of the place.
- A values based approach can take into account the future needs of the asset by addressing factors such as historic structural failure, the need for disaster resilience and the desirability of improved energy efficiency
- Where archaeological reconstructions are being proposed for experimental research or interpretation purposes the greatest care should be taken to avoid harming surviving archaeological evidence
- In the case of archaeological earthworks and archaeological remains that have been removed by excavation, appropriate material to re-establish the pre excavation profile or surface level should be used and an accurate record of the works should be made
- The reconstructed asset should create or have the potential to create, cultural and heritage value in its own right
- The maintenance implications of the proposed reconstruction, and its long-term physical and economic sustainability, should be taken into account from the outset.
- Monitoring of the effectiveness of the reconstruction work, and the consequences of it, should be undertaken and any lessons learned for the future should be shared widely
- A full record of the reconstruction work should be made and deposited in a secure and accessible archive and supplemented by any lessons learned subsequently
- When dealing with historic urban centres as a whole the main elements of significance should be defined and taken into account in developing approaches to reconstruction.

- The potential to reconstruct heritage assets or the creation of comprehensive digital records should never be used to justify demolition, nor to allow physical fabric/archaeological remains to fall in to disrepair

Not every factor will necessarily apply to every individual case. Once the relevant factors have been taken into consideration it should be possible to make balanced decisions on whether reconstruction is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. If this guidance is followed the rationale for the decision and the lessons learned from it should be well evidenced and accessible and be of value in the future.

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