

Historic England Advisory Note on the Reconstruction of Heritage Assets

HO-J Draft 01042016

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 such 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* 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 or is involved with international heritage



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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. 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 help address recovery from acts of cultural destruction overseas. Historic England has therefore used section 4 of this advisory note to update its guidance on the reconstruction of heritage assets to ensure it can offer well informed advice on proposals made to the Cultural Protection Fund involving reconstruction.

1.4 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.

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 **recreation** 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.



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3. Context

3.1 Since the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings published its manifesto in 1877, the management of ancient monuments and historic buildings in the UK 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. There are relatively few examples in the UK of the type of extensive restoration and reconstruction work undertaken by, for example, Viollet-le-Duc in 19th century France.

3.2 This conservative approach emerged in the UK, 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 in effect 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 the UK, 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 UK 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. 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 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.”*



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3.4 Communal values are also inherent in, for example, the reconstruction of the Singhalese 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_IC506_CulturalHeritagePostwar_en.pdf , page 88. There are, unfortunately, other examples from many parts of the world of the deliberate destruction of cultural property. 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. 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 the UK 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 17th century mansion at Uppark, Sussex.

3.5 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.”*

3.6 Such reconstructions need to be based on clear and sufficient evidence if they are to be meaningful and should avoid the recreation of something that never existed in that form in the first place. The concept of authenticity is therefore essential to any



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consideration of reconstruction and 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.*”

3.7 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.*”

3.8 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.*”

3.9 The Riga Charter <http://www.halles-althaus.de/de/aktuelles?p59%5Buid%5D=%7B2e6539fc-9b5d-0e2e-5137-ffe432939b%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...*”



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3.10 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 recreation 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).

3.11 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 . 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.

3.12 International charters and documents 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.



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3.13 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.

- There should be a sufficiently good record of the asset prior to damage or destruction to enable accurate reconstruction rather than speculative recreation
- The relative significance of the elements proposed for reconstruction 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
- 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 historic event, reconstruction should not harm the ability to understand this event
- 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 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 widely accepted international charters a solution should be sought based on respect for the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties with a recognised interest



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- Materials and methods of construction should be selected on the basis of conservation planning and values based assessment so that they truthfully reflect and embody the cultural heritage values of the place.
- 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
- 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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