

Historic Almshouses

A Guide to Managing Change



Summary

This advice note suggests how the heritage significance of almshouses can be conserved as proposals for upgrading are developed. As times change and the need for affordable accommodation is widely felt, provision of appropriately accessible and comfortable homes with contemporary standards of accommodation, allowing residents to remain independent in their homes for as long as possible, is essential. Almshouses derive a distinctive form from their use in providing communal housing often for the elderly, a use which has continued over centuries. This advice note suggests how this significance can be retained while supplying more comfortable and appropriate housing.

This advice note is accompanied by [case studies](#) which illustrate good practice in developing proposals for development works affecting listed almshouses.

Historic England is grateful to the Almshouse Association, which supports and represents independent almshouse charities, in developing this advice note.

This document has been prepared by Richard Morrice.

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1. Introduction

‘... a little house, cell or chamber with a chimney and other necessaries in the same, in the which each of them may by himself eat and drink and rest and sometimes attend to contemplation and prayer’.¹

1. Though written in the mid-fifteenth century and therefore not really reflecting today’s reality, this description is very much still the popular view of provision for an almshouse occupant in a set of almshouses. Almshouses provide affordable housing for people who have specific needs usually including relatively accessible accommodation and some measure of communal facilities. Almshouses often provide such accommodation well but there may, in some cases, be problems in providing for accessibility and communal activities without adversely affecting the special qualities of the almshouse building.
2. This is because almshouses are also often of heritage significance; many are listed, sometimes at a high grade, others are in conservation areas, and still others, while not being nationally listed or within conservation areas, have sufficient architectural and historic significance to be considered in planning terms as heritage assets² – including those identified by the Local Planning Authority, such as on a local heritage list. This advice note is therefore intended to help trustees and their advisers in updating historic almshouses and for local planning authority staff in advising on and deciding applications for planning permission and listed building consent for such works.
3. There is a balance to be struck in dealing with almshouses with heritage significance. Their use for housing is part of that significance and ensuring that they continue to provide accommodation for their beneficiaries reinforces that significance. Indeed, reinforcement of architectural and historic character is often at the heart of the well-being of residents. However, almshouses will only continue to provide appropriate

1 ‘Also we woll and ordeyne that the seed minister and his successours and ev(er)y of the seyde pore men and theire successours have and holde a certeyn place by them self within the seyd howse of almesse that is to sayng a lityl howse a Cell or a Chambir with a chemeney and othir necessarijs in the same. in the whiche ev(er)y of them may by hym selfe ete and drynke and rest and sum tymes among attend to contemplacion and prayoure’ (The Statutes of God’s House, Ewelme, Oxfordshire, X, dating from 1448-1450, quoted in John Goodall, *God’s House at Ewelme: Life, devotion and architecture in a fifteenth-century almshouse*, Aldershot, 2001, 230).

2 Per the NPPF Glossary Heritage assets include designated assets and those identified by the Local Planning Authority (including local listing).

accommodation if they can be upgraded in ways which allow them to provide adequate and appropriate housing. This will need a sympathetic hearing from planning bodies and a flexible approach from trustees and their advisers.

2. What are almshouses?

4. An almshouse is a unit of affordable residential accommodation (usually a house or flat) which belongs to a charity established for purposes which are frequently for the relief of financial hardship by the provision of housing and associated services to beneficiaries who pay a maintenance charge. The accommodation is provided exclusively to meet the charity's purposes and is occupied or is available for occupation under a licence by a qualified beneficiary.
5. Common features of almshouse charities are:
 - The origin of the charity as a private gift for the relief of poverty
 - The need for beneficiaries to pay a weekly maintenance contribution (not a rent) that must not be set at a level that would cause hardship
 - Because of the nature of the accommodation, the need for beneficiaries to show particular consideration for the needs of other residents
 - A significant proportion of the accommodation being permanent endowment
 - Restrictions on who and/or wherefrom those who benefit can be drawn.
6. Almshouses are therefore fundamentally different from sheltered accommodation and other forms of affordable housing, whether provided privately or by local or other authorities. The provision of almshouses is usually therefore by charities, often local, run by trustees, and they cannot be sold except in very clearly defined circumstances – they are thus intended for use in perpetuity. The essential quality of living within them, also, is communal, sometimes with a warden but often administered by volunteers with the trustees.

3. Historical overview

7. The history of almshouses stretches back to medieval times when religious orders cared for the poor. Originally called hospitals, colleges or bede houses, in the sense of hospitality and shelter, the oldest surviving almshouse foundation is thought to be the Hospital of St Oswald in Worcester founded circa 990. It is believed that the then Bishop of Worcester (St Oswald) created this sanctuary where the brothers could ‘minister to the sick, bury the dead, relieve the poor and give shelter to travelers who arrived after the city gates had closed at night’.
8. Provision for care of the poor by monastic houses - perhaps 800 such hospitals in all - became more diffuse in the later middle ages following the closure of hospitals due to lower incomes following the Black Death and the increasing popularity of inns for travelers³. By the Dissolution of the Monasteries towards the middle of the sixteenth century, it may have lapsed in some places. Provision for the poor, including the elderly, then passed largely to parishes, though provision could be based on charities established by craft and other guilds, livery companies, the gentry and nobility, clergy, merchants and royalty, among others, in part through conscience but also perhaps with the possibility of securing their own salvation and even of self-advertisement.
9. The architectural expression of almshouses reflected that of other medieval collegiate building types, such as schools, colleges, even country houses, with individual units set around shared facilities, particularly the hall and the chapel. This arrangement continued long after the end of medieval times because rooms arranged around courtyards, or as terraced cottages at a smaller scale, fitted both later purposes and the classical layout of axial groups. As such they simply developed stylistically to follow the trends of the time, though often inflected by local fashions, sometimes based on local craft traditions. It only changed markedly with the development of other housing models in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of which the garden village, for instance, became a model for larger groups of almshouses at the end of the nineteenth century. The postwar almshouse, meanwhile, reflects changes in housing and welfare provision under the welfare state, along with changes in needs for comfort, accessibility and privacy. This led to the development of lift-accessible multi-storey blocks with more fully fitted kitchens and bathrooms.

3 See Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England*, New Haven and London, 2021, 149.



Figure 1: Oblique aerial view from the south-west, taken using a drone, showing the north range of Holgate's Hospital. © Historic England Archive (DP486459)

- 10.** Historic almshouses can therefore be small and vernacular in character or larger and more architectural; they can be simple in design or inventive and even eccentric on occasion. Although often modest, their architectural detailing may many a time be borrowed from higher status models, giving a charming stateliness in miniature to the building. Almshouses can be street buildings or, in larger examples, can be more inward-looking, arranged around courtyards, and they sometimes have communal rooms, particularly dining halls or chapels. They can be related to parish churches or within cathedral closes, and they sometimes have chapels where their foundation has a religious purpose. Indeed, the chapel can often dominate, especially when placed symmetrically as so many are, with the richest interior with some sense of the numinous⁴. A garden for the use of the residents may sometimes be provided.
- 11.** The resulting buildings are often very attractive and this, accompanied by the undeniable historic interest of such medieval and post-medieval provision for the poor, has led to their listing at a high rate and often a high grade. Their continuing popularity in use proves their continuing need but the changing nature of old age and higher living standards - residents will usually have left a home of a more contemporary standard of comfort - means that what might have been appropriate for the housing provision of an elderly beneficiary in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries may no longer be sufficient today.

4 The [Churchcare](#) website gives useful information about caring for chapels, even where the chapel is not in formal religious or Church of England use.

4. Legal and policy background

12. Almshouses are both historically significant as buildings built for welfare purposes and beautiful, particularly because they respond to both national and local architectural traditions and fashions. As a result many almshouses of all types and periods have been listed for their special architectural and historic interest since the outset of listing. However, it is worth noting that not all significant almshouses may be listed, particularly more recent examples. Where a significant almshouse is not on the list, or where a different grade might be appropriate, an application may be made to Historic England to assess the case for listing (see [What is listing?](#) which gives further information on listing, as well as the address for Listing Enquiries who may be able to help).
13. Unlisted examples, moreover, may be in conservation areas or on local heritage lists or may otherwise have sufficient heritage significance to be considered heritage assets in terms of the planning system. The protection regime for listed buildings and conservation areas is set out in law, the [Planning \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) Act 1990](#), with clarification of the approach to be taken in policy (the [National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF](#)) and guidance (the [Planning Practice Guidance - PPG](#)). Where applications for listed building consent (LBC) or planning permission are needed, the NPPF and the PPG set the framework for decision-making and it is thus essential, where successful applications are to be made, that government policy and guidance is followed.
14. It is important to emphasise also the need for buildings such as almshouses to be compliant with the [Equalities Act 2010](#) in, for instance and so far as is reasonably practicable, approximating the access enjoyed by disabled people to that enjoyed by the rest of the public. Given that almshouses are occupied by people who may be less able in various ways, proposals for change will need to ensure that the Equalities Act's duties are emphasised in applications for change. Such applications will therefore need to take account of [Approved Document M \(Access to and use of buildings\)](#) of the Building Regulations 2010, which sets out minimum requirements to ensure that a broad range of people are able to access and use facilities within buildings, but the need to ensure accessibility may extend to other matters relating to changes to historic almshouses. Historic England provides advice on the additional considerations prompted by these requirements in [Easy Access to Historic Buildings](#).

15. The planning system as it affects heritage assets - described in the NPPF as ‘a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest’ - treats such sites and buildings generally, only differentiating between levels of protection in so far as they affect decision-making on applications for planning permission or listed building consent⁵. The planning system, and those listed building consents, are set out in law but, as the NPPF takes that law into account in explaining the policy, there is no need to detail those differences here. For simplicity’s sake, this advice note therefore follows the approach given in the NPPF.
16. Where works are proposed to a listed almshouse, or to an unlisted almshouse in a conservation area, listed building consent and/or planning permission may be required. It is best to check with the LPA before works are undertaken because unauthorised works may result in enforcement action or prosecution - it is always best to check beforehand. Historic England provides advice on these matters in [HEAN 16: Listed Building Consent](#) which outlines ways to ensure that applicants are unlikely to face enforcement action or prosecution.
17. Further advice on the legal and policy background to the protection of listed buildings, buildings in conservation areas and other heritage assets, is given in Historic England advice notes (HEANs), particularly [HEAN 12: Statements of Heritage Significance](#); [HEAN 16: Listed Building Consent](#); [HEAN 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management](#); and [HEAN 7: Local Heritage Listing](#). A brief resumé of the approach to applications for change is given at paragraphs 28-34 below.
18. To ensure successful applications, almshouse trusts will find it helpful to take advice on works to buildings, where those have heritage significance, from specialist advisers who are familiar with heritage assets, both listed and unlisted, especially advisers with conservation accreditations ([Finding Professional Help](#)). The local planning authority, particularly the Conservation Officer, may also be able to give helpful advice. Specialist advisers will also be able to help in finding contractors/craftspeople who are experienced in work with listed buildings, especially where works could affect special interest if not carried out in an appropriate way. And where there is harm to significance, they will be able to provide the clear and convincing justification, as well as identify public benefits, to inform a balanced judgement.

⁵ Listing of buildings is a complex subject and questions surrounding the different grades of buildings (Grades I and II* denoting greater importance than Grade II (which constitute over 90% of all listed buildings, though these still are classed as having national importance) and the law around curtilage are considered further on the [What is Listing?](#) page of the Historic England website. [Historic England Advice Note 10: Listed buildings and curtilage](#) and [Historic England Advice Note 16: Listed Building Consent](#) explain the background and give suggestions for further advice.

19. Specialist advisers will also be able to advise trustees both on works which may not need consent/permission, because they do not affect significance (and on how to carry out works which might need consent in such a way that they do not affect significance and thus do not need consent) and on how to carry out works which would affect significance in such a way that they can gain the necessary approval ([HEAN 16: Listed Building Consent](#) provides useful advice on this). An inflexible approach without compromise, either by the local planning authority in refusing change, or by the applicant in seeking change, may prevent new life being brought to listed buildings. A well-informed, reasonable and proportionate approach on both sides – informed by requirements in legislation and policy – is essential.



Figure 2: Emery Down Almshouses, Silver Street, Emery Down, Lyndhurst, Hampshire.
© Historic England Archive (DP438492)

5. An approach to change in almshouses

20. The main challenge when considering change to historic almshouses is balancing the needs of the almshouse residents and the charity while sustaining the significance of the building. As almshouses developed, their plan form, exterior and interior design and arrangement, materials, features and decoration, developed as times changed, expressing the social, economic, technological and artistic history of their age. This is why an understanding of the particular significance of a set of almshouses is key to conserving significance - the way to effect changes or to update a set of medieval almshouses will be different to that for an early twentieth century set, and even one from another within a time period.
21. Heritage assets have survived not only because they are significant architecturally and historically but because they have been found useful and it is important that, as needs change, their use develops. Finding the balance between change and preservation is where conservation lies and that balance may be located differently in different building types and even within building types.
22. In the case of almshouses, the need is to balance the conservation of their heritage significance with their continuing use in housing older people. Almshouse residents retain their freedom and independence by living their lives independently within a safe and secure environment. Whereas nearly all heritage assets will need to be brought up to modern standards, in some way, almshouse use implies some distinctive constraints:
 - Almshouses were often built at a time when kitchen and bathing facilities were less than is ordinarily expected today or they were communal. This is not appropriate now and many almshouses have provided new facilities for each resident/individual home by sub-division (which may reduce the number of units available in a set of almshouses, thus affecting the income available to an almshouse charity) or by extension.
 - Some residents of almshouses may be less mobile than younger householders. Easy accessibility both around and into buildings, and within them, may therefore be important.

- Almshouse residents may be retired and this may have other impacts on how the building is used. Providing social facilities may be more important now than it might have been in the past but historic communal facilities, such as almshouse chapels, may in themselves have considerable heritage significance, which means that repurposing without harm to significance is difficult. Residents may also have cars which leads to a requirement for car-parking.
- 23. The main challenge therefore when considering modifications to historic almshouses is weighing the needs of residents while sustaining the significance of the almshouse and its features. By understanding the distinctive nature of their heritage significance, their adaptability will be better understood, therefore continuing these buildings in use and, by reinforcing their use, even enhancing it. Almshouses remain in use because they are still functional for their residents; ensuring that they remain useful for the future will help to sustain their heritage significance.
- 24. If the need is proven, there may be ways to mitigate the impact of the changes, perhaps through design, layout or reversibility. Just because there is a need to carry out changes does not automatically mean that the need trumps the significance. The [NPPF](#) points out (paragraph 202) that heritage assets ‘should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations’. Furthermore paragraph 210 of the [NPPF](#) underlines the desirability of sustaining and enhancing their significance, the positive contribution they make to sustainable communities, and the desirability of new development also making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Therefore, where harm to significance would arise from a proposal, alternatives which would avoid or mitigate harmful impacts should be considered and, if that is not possible, any remaining harmful impacts should be justified and weighed (see [paragraphs 207-216 of the NPPF](#)).
- 25. That is why it is important, when considering works to heritage assets, in this case historic almshouses, that a flexible approach to change is needed. Just as local planning authorities will take a balanced view between the need for change and heritage significance, so trusts should be prepared to adjust proposals so that change can be accommodated while avoiding harm, and if that is not possible, minimising harm to the heritage asset.



Figure 3: Hugh Sexey's Hospital, Bruton, Somerset.
© Historic England Archive (DP438511)

6. Characteristic changes to almshouses

26. It may be useful to characterise some of the features of almshouses which may affect, and be affected by, proposals to upgrade them for current and future use. Almshouses have generally provided accommodation for older and retired people. They thus need to take account of the lives they lead. Until recently, with the advent of the lift, they have tended to be one or two storey in form, though there are some rare examples of older, taller buildings.
27. The plan form is generally simple with pairs or often longer rows of single or two-room cottages, often with single or shared external front doors, perhaps allowing access to opposed doors, allowing some privacy to the individual homes. Some almshouses however have multi-floor homes with staircases between the floors. And some individual flats may be accessible off staircases, like college buildings or mansion flats. While covered walkways or loggias allowing sheltered access to individual flats at ground-floor level and above are quite common, the provision of corridors is rarer, except in twentieth century buildings or in earlier almshouses which have later been altered. It is generally the case that almshouses, like terraces of cottages and houses, rarely have horizontal internal access within ranges, from one unit to another.

- **Accessibility challenges**

Almshouse residents may have mobility problems. These may lead to difficulties of accessibility both within buildings and on the wider estate. Not only may stairs present difficulties but steps at building thresholds may also be hazards and the external surroundings, if not level, may be problematic for people for whom uneven surfaces may be a difficulty.

In some cases, access has been eased by the provision of internal corridors within ranges, by sub-division of rooms, perhaps along the back of blocks, or by extensions to the rear of blocks. Such alterations are, however, intrusive, and may impact on significance. It may therefore cause less harm to ensure that more mobile residents are housed on upper floors and less mobile residents on lower floors and/or perhaps given the opportunity to live in a new range in a suitable location on the site. The addition of aids to mobility, such as rails to steps and grab handles at key points, may be of assistance, though these should be carefully designed not to be obtrusive.

Historic England has published advice on [Easy Access to Historic Buildings](#) and [Easy Access to Historic Landscapes](#).

- **Kitchens and bathrooms**

Most historic almshouses were built with communal kitchen and bathing facilities, if at all. Residents nowadays need these provided individually, in many cases with the provision of wet rooms rather than more traditional bathrooms, as these are more easily accessible and usable. These can be provided either by sub-division of the building or in extensions of the unit; in both cases, the new facilities need to be immediately and physically linked to each unit. Such changes must be carefully considered so that any harmful impacts are minimised. Internal sub-division may, for instance, lead to the loss of accommodation within the building and extension may disrupt important elevations or the setting of the whole. Judging the balance between need and impact and considering alternative provision will be key.

- **Merging units**

Historic almshouses were often built with small individual rooms and therefore the provision of more spacious accommodation by merging or combining units and rooms may increase the comfort and livability of units. Merging and/or sub-division, however, will lead to the loss of units or parts of units within the building, thus reducing the overall number of units, and interrupting and obscuring the historic plan form; extension may disrupt important elevations or the setting of the whole. Merging units should therefore be carefully weighed against the heritage significance of the building.

In almost all cases the regular sequence of front doors is essential to the balance and rhythm of the original design. Therefore, where front doors, in particular, are taken out of commission, they may be permanently locked but they should not be removed and the aperture infilled (except possibly on their inner face).

- **New free-standing buildings, to provide extra facilities or further residential units**

Almshouse groups may have been built with communal amenities which can easily be converted and used by all the residents but they may not have such facilities or those they have may not be easy to alter/convert without harm to their architectural and historic significance, through sub-division or loss of fittings (for instance pews/benches and other liturgical fittings in chapels). In such cases, provision of wider amenities in a separate building may supply a pressing need.

Where an almshouse stands in its own grounds, there may be space to provide further facilities, such as communal or meeting rooms, guest rooms and facilities or more residential units. The setting of the almshouse may however be sensitive and locations and designs should be explored which reduce or minimise impact on the contribution of setting to the asset, whether of the almshouses themselves or the wider setting of heritage assets around the proposed building, in so far as that setting contributes to the significance of the whole - see [Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets \(2nd ed\)](#). Similar considerations may apply to the provision of car-parking within the setting of a historic almshouse.

- **Sustainable energy improvements**

Comfort is an important contributor to the quality of life of residents in an almshouse and energy improvements therefore an important requirement. In the light of the Government's declaration of a climate emergency, and the need for residential buildings to be more energy efficient, a more sustainable approach is needed for the improvement of their energy and carbon performance. Using technologies which generate energy from renewable or low carbon sources, thus emitting low or no carbon emissions, will be part of the answer, as well as improving thermal performance by adding appropriate insulation, secondary glazing, draught-proofing, etc. Advice on such changes, and on those which are likely to need the appropriate consents, and which are not, is available in [Historic England Advice Note 18: Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency](#), including changes which can be made to historic buildings through the planning process, and where caution is needed (it is not exhaustive but focuses on the most common changes in response to climate change).

Indeed, understanding climate risk may be a major consideration given the need to manage temperature, whether over-heating or heating where both extremes may represent threats to the health and wellbeing of older people. Accurate and instructive information on energy efficiency improvements may be obtained from a comprehensive home energy assessment carried out by a suitably qualified independent specialist assessor experienced with traditional buildings. Typically, this 'whole building approach' would consider a range of issues including the current energy performance of the building, how well the services perform, the levels of energy use related to how the building is used and occupied, the condition of the building, its local climate, orientation and exposure, its heritage significance and so forth. Historic England has published a suite of technical advice on retrofitting historic buildings to improve their energy efficiency, including [Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings](#), on [low and zero carbon technologies](#) and on [Energy Performance Certificates](#) for further information.

Almshouses will need to comply with the domestic minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) where the property is let domestically on an assured tenancy, a regulated tenancy or a domestic agricultural tenancy. This requires the building to have a valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) with a rating of E or above, or a Registered Exemption prior to letting a property. Guidance is given on the website of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: [Guidance for landlords of domestic private rented property on how to comply with the 2018 'Minimum Level of Energy Efficiency' standard \(EPC band E\)](#).

Almshouses which are listed buildings may be exempt from the need for compliance with minimum energy standards under the Energy Performance Certificate regime, though this is qualified “insofar as compliance with certain minimum energy performance requirements would unacceptably alter their character or appearance”. It would be useful to consult the local authority’s conservation officer to establish where the line between acceptable and unacceptable change lies but it is worth bearing in mind that some energy improvement works to historic buildings are unlikely to need separate permissions, including simple draught proofing, secondary glazing (though care is needed where listed buildings are concerned) and loft insulation. But, before any works are begun, the ‘whole building approach’ should be taken, so that ineffective works are minimised. See [Energy Performance Certificates](#) for further information.

- **Condition surveys and reports**

The protection of heritage significance and the fact that historic buildings deteriorate in ways which are different from more modern buildings makes it very useful, and almost certainly cheaper, to keep an eye on the condition of the building on a regular basis. Many almshouse charities already commission inspections every five years (quinquennial inspections) as a very useful way to sort out the priorities for repair and up-grading in the most economical way. Such a regime of inspections also helps to reassure local planning authorities that the charity is taking its responsibilities for the historic building seriously. Such condition surveys may also usefully consider the condition of electrical installations and wiring, heating and domestic cold and hot water installations, and other services and their upgrading, so as to take account of the heritage significance of the building.

7. Applications for change

28. Certain types of change will need planning permission and/or listed building consent. Planning permission is required for changes which are defined as development, including building works, some kinds of demolition and changes of use to existing buildings. Listed building consent will be needed for demolition of a listed building, or alteration or extension that would affect their character as buildings of special architectural and historic interest.
29. Because works to heritage assets, whether designated or not, may affect their heritage significance, it is important to establish that significance at the outset before the detail of a proposed development has been refined. The key to successful applications for listed building consent and planning permission is assessment of significance sufficient to attain an understanding of the impact of the proposal on the significance, both positive and negative. This will allow applicants and their advisers to draw up appropriate applications and it will allow the local planning authority to come to a judgment about the level of impact on that significance and therefore on the merits of the proposal (see NPPF, paragraphs 207-208). The assessment of significance and the development of proposals and applications is best approached by assessment of the proposed development in stages which starts with analysis of the heritage asset to establish its significance.

The following are the main steps in the staged approach:

- Understand the history, form and materials of the listed building, and its setting
Analyse and understand its significance
- Develop the proposal, so as to conserve that significance
- Work out whether the proposal would harm that significance
- Consider alternatives which avoid or minimise any harmful impacts on significance and take opportunities to better reveal or enhance it
- Justify any remaining harmful impacts
- And, where harm is permitted to important elements of a listed building, an analysis and record of elements being lost may be made, disseminated and archived
- Identify any public benefits that can be weighed against harmful impacts

30. For more information on permission and consents, see the Historic England website. Information on listed building consent is given in HEAN 16: Listed Building Consent; on conservation area protection in HEAN 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management; and on local listing in HEAN 7: Local Heritage Listing.
31. By following the staged approach the owner will either establish that consent/permission from the local planning authority is not needed or maximise the likelihood of a positive outcome and minimise the risk of abortive works, raised costs and delays. [HEAN 12: Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets](#) gives helpful information on the assessment of significance of heritage assets as part of a staged approach to decision-making, as well as helping applicants to determine where significance lies in heritage assets.
32. Applicants will also find it helpful to consider whether the significance of the almshouse or the harm which a proposal might involve requires an expert assessment to be carried out so as to achieve an adequate understanding of its impact. It is good practice for trustees to seek advice from professionally accredited experts and to comply with relevant standards and advice.
33. [HEAN 16: Listed Building Consent](#) gives further information qualifying the need for LBC for maintenance and minor repair to listed buildings, including definitions of some of the more often misunderstood terms, how to achieve greater certainty as to whether listed building consent is actually needed, finding expert advice and the information which successful applications need. [HEAN 7: Local Heritage Listing](#) explains how local heritage is protected and how heritage assets with local character and distinctiveness are identified by local planning authorities and by communities. It therefore also explains how local planning authorities make decisions on applications for development where non-designated heritage assets are concerned. This is also true of [HEAN 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management](#) which explores how change is managed to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas. LPAs, trustees and their advisers will find these advice notes useful when considering proposals for change to almshouses with heritage significance.
34. The different ways to engage with the local planning authority at an early stage is emphasised in [HEAN 16: Listed Building Consent](#), particularly how to seek pre-application services; early engagement will be useful whether or not the historic almshouse is listed. Expert advisers will be able to advise on how to achieve the best outcome from early engagement but clear information on what is proposed, together with simple plans and photographs are most useful. Decision makers will need to consider the significance of each individual asset affected when deciding on the capacity for change. It should also be noted that, while a Statement of Heritage

Significance may form part of a Design and Access Statement, it is not a substitute for it. The relationship between Statements of Heritage Significance and Design and Access Statements is explained in [HEAN 12: Statements of Heritage Significance](#).



Figure 4: Exterior view showing two of the front doors at the Manwood Orchard Almshouses, built in 2016 as a modern range to Manwood's Hospital. © Historic England Archive (DP487885)

8. Further reading

Government Guidance

[National Planning Policy Framework](#)

[Planning Practice Guidance](#)

Historic England publications

Good Practice Advice Notes (GPAs)

[Historic England Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment](#)

[Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets \(2nd ed\)](#)

Historic England Advice Notes (HEANs)

[HEAN 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management](#)

[HEAN 2: Making Changes to Heritage Assets](#)

[HEAN 7: Local Heritage Listing](#)

[HEAN 12: Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets](#)

[HEAN 16: Listed building consent](#)

[HEAN 18: Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency](#)

Advice on energy efficiency

[Historic England Advice Note 18: Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency](#)

[Energy Efficiency and Retrofit in Historic Buildings](#)

[Low and Zero-Carbon Technologies](#)

[Energy Performance Certificates](#)

Other publications

[Easy Access to Historic Buildings](#)

Background reading

W H Godfrey, *The English Almshouse*, London, 1955

Helen Caffrey, Nigel Goose and Anne Langley (eds.) *The British Almshouse: new perspectives on philanthropy ca 1400-1914*, Milton Keynes, 2016

Anna Hallett, *Almshouses*, Oxford, 2004

Brian Howson, *Houses of Noble Poverty: A History of the English Almshouse*, Sunbury-on-Thames, 1993

Brian Howson, *Almshouses: A Social and Architectural History*, Cheltenham, 2008

John Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme: Life, devotion and architecture in a fifteenth century almshouse*, Aldershot, 2001

There are also many local publications covering almshouses by county or as monographs.

Further sources of advice and information

The [Almshouse Association](#) is the charity which supports and represents independent almshouse charities across the UK; it has helped Historic England in writing this advice. It produces guidance manuals and training seminars, interest-free loans and funding, as well as a platform for members to discuss best practice, advertise resident vacancies, and share knowledge. The association has a panel of architectural consultants who give advice to members on proposals for change to almshouses, and it runs an award scheme to promote excellence in change and conservation to almshouses, thereby providing exemplars of contemporary work to almshouses.

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