



The setting of heritage assets

For many years the consultancy has carried out analysis on prospective developments which affect one's experience of heritage assets, from single buildings in an historic street to a substantial building within a historic landscape, even the highest caliber of landscape, such as a Royal Park or a World Heritage Site. There has been a tendency to claim that every impact on such a heritage asset is a question of 'setting', particularly in regard to high buildings proposed at a distance from a heritage asset. We have found this to be confusing and unhelpful in making a thorough analysis and enabling clarity in decision making. We have adopted the approach set out below and aim to influence future policy and guidance on the subject.

Setting of a designated heritage asset can be defined, and agreed by careful study and consensus. It will vary in depth and breadth according to the significance of the asset, particularly where it forms part of a group such as the Westminster World Heritage Site, the Lambeth Palace group or Middle Temple, to use well known London examples.

In the case of a listed building, there is always a setting which, when carefully examined and properly researched, can and should be agreed between the land owner and the local authority. It may be a good or a bad setting, and is likely to change over time. The local authority has a statutory duty to have special regard for the preservation of the setting of a listed building. Tall buildings, visible in relation to views of a listed building and outside the agreed setting, do not affect the setting of the building, as such, but are likely to affect the setting of a particular view. It is no less important.

If the development is so prominent that it dominates a number of relevant views of the listed building, it is likely to give rise to an adverse impact on the special significance of the listed building.

In the case of conservation areas, very often there is no setting. In some cases there are views in and out of the area which are of significance. These are often linear and easy to define. A particular approach route into a conservation area, may be important to the experience of it. Normally this should be included within the designated boundary. In the case of 'views out', out of scale or poorly designed buildings may affect the character and appearance of the area. A development outside, but visible from a conservation area does not necessarily give rise to an adverse impact. There is no statutory requirement in the planning acts for decision makers to have regard for the preservation of a setting for a conservation area. Setting is ever changing and that change should be managed. Dominant buildings which lie outside a conservation area are not necessarily within the setting, may affect the setting of a view or many views and may directly affect, therefore, the character and appearance adversely.

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