

APPROVED

# Listed Building Interiors

SPG<sup>BH</sup>  
note | |

supplementary planning guidance

## What is an SPG?

A Supplementary Planning Guidance Note (SPG) is one of the material considerations that can be taken into account when determining a planning application. It is intended to provide helpful guidance consistent with the provisions of the statutory Local Plans. This SPG Note is one of a series produced by Brighton & Hove City Council and it is to be read in conjunction with the Brighton and Hove Local Plan Second Deposit Draft 2001. The guidance is also based on that contained in the Government's Planning Policy Guidance Note PPG15 – Planning and the Historic Environment.

This Guidance Note was adopted by the Environment Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2003 following public consultation, as a material consideration for the purposes of development control. It supplements policies BE3 and BE5 the Hove Borough Local Plan 1995, policies ENV.31 and ENV.32 of the Brighton Borough Local Plan 1995 and policies HE1 and HE2 of the emergent Brighton and Hove Local Plan. The last of these documents will supersede the first two in due course.

## Introduction

In all cases where a building is statutorily listed the interior of the building is legally covered by that listing irrespective of the grade of listing or the age, style or condition of the building. Consequently, listed building consent will be required for any works of alteration to the interior which, in the council's judgement, affect its special architectural or historic interest. The council recognises that historic buildings must adapt to meet modern needs but aims to ensure that such changes are carried out in a way that clearly retains the special interest of the buildings.

This Guidance Note advises on what type of works will require consent and what criteria the council will apply in determining whether or not such works are acceptable or are likely to be acceptable. It also gives more specific advice on the common issues of intensification of existing uses and carrying out fire precaution works. Since the majority of the listed buildings in Brighton and Hove are domestic-type properties of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (even where now in hotel, office or retail use), this guidance note concentrates particularly on this building type, but the principles referred to are generally applicable to all listed buildings. If, however, you have a query about a very different type of listed building, or a form of alteration not covered by this guidance, we would suggest that you contact a Conservation Officer to discuss the matter at an early stage.

## WHAT WORKS REQUIRE CONSENT?

All works which involve alterations to the plan form or layout of the building will require listed building consent. This would include the removal or part removal of walls (whether or not they are load bearing or original), chimney breasts, floors, ceilings and staircases and the erection of walls, partitions or screens or the insertion of floors or staircases. Consent will also be required for the removal of historic building fabric (such as brickwork, lathe and plaster, floorboards, joists, rafters, beams etc.) except in the case of small areas of localised repairs or strictly like-for-like replacement. Equally important are internal fixtures, finishes and decorative items. Consent will therefore be required for the removal or alteration of historic features such as window shutters, paneled doors, original fitted cupboards or shelving, architraves, skirting boards, ceiling cornices, ceiling roses, dado rails, picture rails, wall paneling, fireplaces, staircase balusters and floor or wall tiling etc. Reinstating such features which have been lost is welcome but will nevertheless require consent.

### Repairs or Alterations?

General like-for-like repairs, maintenance and redecoration works do not require consent. If, however, structural repairs are proposed that involve the insertion of modern materials such as steel or concrete columns or beams, then consent is likely to be required. Damp proofing works would require consent if they involve the replacement of historic timber, brick or tile floors with concrete or the replacement of substantial areas of historic plaster with modern plaster. The replacement of lathe and plaster ceilings with plasterboard would also constitute an alteration requiring consent. Internal decoration does not normally require consent unless it is proposed to paint timber unpainted paneling or, in rare cases, it would affect historic wall painting or wallpaper.

### Services

Another form of alteration which may require listed building consent is the insertion or renewal of services such as pipes for gas, heating, water or waste and cables or wires for electrical supply, cable TV, computer trunking, alarm systems etc. In particular consent will normally be required for surface-mounted pipes or cables. Running such services within floor/ceiling voids or chasing them into walls would not normally require consent provided that this work does not necessitate major structural strengthening works and does not involve the loss of significant historic fabric or decorative mouldings.

### Kitchens and Bathrooms

The installation of fitted cupboards / wardrobes or the replacement of existing modern kitchen units or sanitary fittings would not normally require consent provided that the work does not involve the removal or part removal of cornices, skirting boards, architraves, dado rails, picture rails, paneling or historic tiling etc. However, in those cases where original kitchen or bathroom fixtures remain then consent will be required to remove them (e.g. an original cast iron cooking range as illustrated). Relocating a kitchen or bathroom to another room will normally require listed building consent and details will be required of how mechanical ventilation and water/waste pipe runs will be achieved to comply with the Building Regulations.



## WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN A LISTED INTERIOR?

The interior of a listed building is generally of equal importance as the exterior and proposed alterations must consider the building as whole rather than looking to retain or restore the exterior at the expense of the interior. It is not only grand, decorative interiors which are important. Simple, humble cottage interiors or the basements of large houses have just as much historical importance, in architectural or social terms, as do luxuriously decorated drawing rooms (though the latter may be more sensitive to minor alterations).

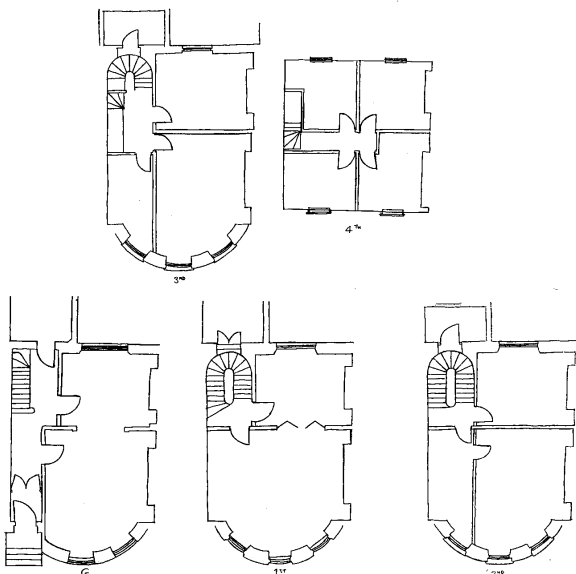
### The Guiding Principles

The approach taken when considering all proposals for internal alterations is an archaeological one as much as a visual one. It involves preserving as much of the historic building fabric and form as possible and paying careful attention to the original uses of the various parts of the building. Where alteration and intervention is acceptable then such alterations must, as far as possible, be easily reversible. So when historic features are compromised by a new layout they should be retained in situ even if they are to be hidden; that way they remain to be restored should the use of the building or needs of the occupier change in the future. However, retention of a feature in a way that it will be hidden from view should always be the last option. Later alterations to a building (e.g. Victorian or Edwardian remodeling or extension) form part of the building's history and should not be disregarded as necessarily being of less interest.

Indeed sensitive alteration of a listed interior depends upon a clear archaeological understanding of the building's development and possible structural modification. For example, some 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings were re-fronted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and these may have concealed timber framing. Where substantial alteration or conversion works are proposed the council will expect the applicant to base the proposals on a thorough understanding of the building's original form and to demonstrate that research and/or investigation work has been undertaken which informs the submitted proposals.

### Plan Form

The starting point when considering proposals to a listed interior is always the plan form (layout) of the original building. All alterations will be expected to respect the original plan form and to work around it so that it remains clearly 'readable'. Therefore the complete or substantial removal of original walls will not normally be acceptable and the creation of large open plan spaces will be considered wholly inappropriate. The typical floor plan of an 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century townhouse consists of two main rooms at each level with the main stairwell to one side (see illustration below). The 'spine wall' between the two rooms is of particular importance, both structurally and historically.



A variation to this typical plan form has the stairwell located at a right angle between the front and rear rooms. Rarer still, in some older cottage buildings the stair may adjoin a central chimney breast. In all plan forms the relationship between circulation space and rooms is very important and should not be lost in any alterations.

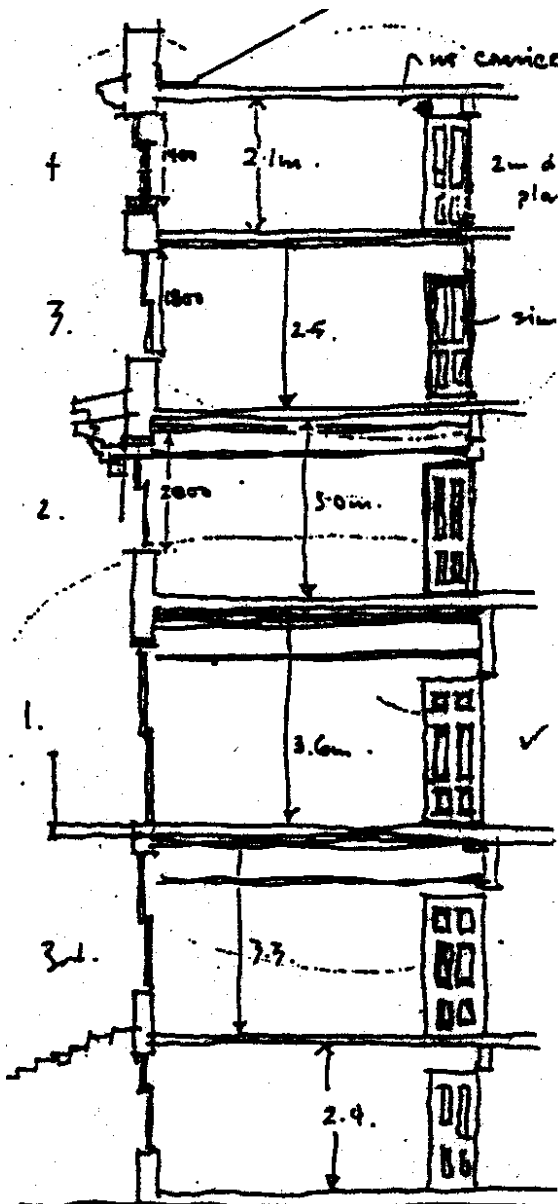
The front rooms are usually the largest and most important rooms, particularly on the principal ground and first floors. In many cases the principal front and rear rooms were linked by a wide opening with a timber or plaster architrave or classical surround which was fitted with folding paneled doors. From second floor level and above the front 'room' was usually originally divided into two unequal rooms, with the smaller room having originally been a dressing room, or sometimes an additional bedroom with its own fireplace. It should be noted that the positions of walls and partitions within historic buildings generally line through from floor to floor and all partitions

contribute to the structural integrity of the building. In some cases it will be acceptable to create wider openings in dividing walls in order to link two rooms. In such cases a length of wall should always be retained at each end, together with a downstand from the ceiling, so that the original division may still be clearly read. Any new structural beam necessary to achieve this should be confined to the width of the wall.

The positions of chimney breasts and staircases (including secondary servants' stairs) are extremely important in determining the original plan form of an historic building. Their removal will rarely be acceptable, irrespective of whether there is a fireplace in existence or whether the stair is of grand or modest design or is in use.

## New Layout Proposals

When proposing the erection of new partition walls the above guidance will apply but the issue of increased loading on the historic structure must also be considered. Any new layout must respect the original plan form and room proportions and must not divide the floor into ill-proportioned, irregular spaces. New partitions must not bisect windows or chimney breasts and the main stairwell should normally be uninterrupted by screens and doors. Where original door openings are no longer functionally required they should simply be fixed shut; where this is impractical they should be blocked up on one side (usually the room side) with the door and architraves retained on the hall or landing side.



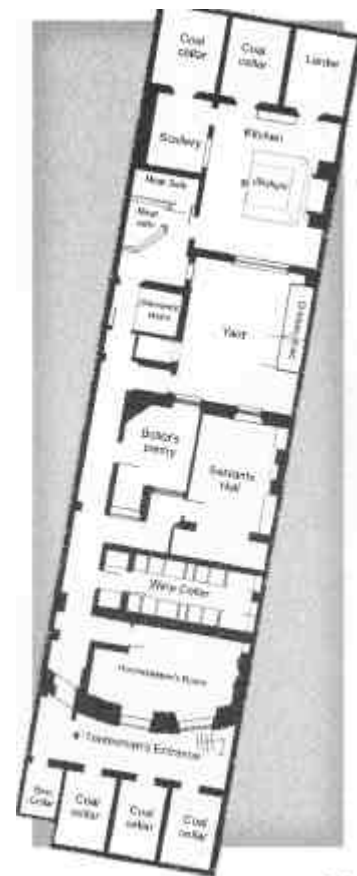
## Hierarchy of Floors

Appreciating the special character of listed interiors also requires an understanding of the traditional hierarchy and use of the different floors of a historic building, particularly in the case of the larger, grander townhouses. Here the ground and first floors contained the principle rooms. The ceiling heights are greater on these floors whilst the size and detailing of doors, skirtings, cornices and mouldings etc. are greater and finer. The proportions of the rooms and their decorative features diminish in scale and detail as the building ascends. It is usually the case that the ground and first floor rooms will be more sensitive to alteration than the upper floors and often it will be considered inappropriate to subdivide these floors at all. Where the principal front and rear rooms have original folding doors dividing them these should always be retained and should not be bisected by partitions. Any new door openings and all detailing must respect the scale and detailing of the floor concerned. At top floor level it will be considered inappropriate to raise the ceiling, especially where the intention is to expose roof timbers that were never intended to be seen.

## Basements and Service Wings

The layout of the basement was originally very different from the other floors, consisting of a series of rooms extending further back into a rear extension, each with their own very specific use related to the service of the house (see illustration right). Again this particular plan form must be respected. Unfortunately, basements have often suffered more from past inappropriate alterations than other floors in the mistaken belief that they are of lesser importance. Therefore those that do remain in anything like their original layout will be considered to be especially important and major alterations will not be considered acceptable. In all cases basements contain a significant amount of load-bearing masonry and major structural alterations would have an impact on the building as a whole and will be unacceptable. Where original matchboard partitions, kitchen ranges, wine stores, larders, dumb waiters or other service features remain they should be retained.

Rear service wings should not be considered unimportant simply because they lack obvious decorative features. These spaces played an important role in the history of the building and their relationship with the main house must be carefully considered. Circulation spaces and links between the two are integral elements of this relationship.



## Decorative Features, Finishes and Detailing

The style, extent and detailing of internal features are dependent upon the age and grandness of the building and, within each building, upon the hierarchy of floors. Principal ground and first floor rooms in grand houses may have heavy paneled doors with bolection mouldings and possibly applied mouldings to panels, deep skirtings with heavily moulded top sections, substantial dado and/or picture rails, richly ornamented cornices, wide ceiling roses and grand marble fireplace surrounds. By the stage the top floor is reached there is likely to be found no more than thin doors with plain square edged panels without mouldings, low, plain skirtings and small timber fireplace surrounds.

In modest cottage buildings or artisan houses there is likely to be a more consistent level of decorative finish throughout, which will vary dependent on the age and size of the property but which will be noticeably smaller in scale and level of detail than a grand townhouse. However, all such historic elements are considered to be important and the council will take the same approach irrespective of the level of grandness or richness of the features.

Where alterations are acceptable in principle the retention of such internal features will be required. New partitions should be scribed around existing mouldings, not cut through them, and existing cornices, skirtings, dado or picture rails should normally be matched on the new partitions. All new doors should be traditional paneled doors purpose made to match the proportions and mouldings of original adjoining doors, incorporating fire-proof board within the construction where necessary. In those cases where some loss or concealment of original features is considered, on balance, to be acceptable then those features must be recorded prior to the works.

## Reinstatement of Decorative Features

The restoration or reinstatement of mouldings and fireplaces etc. will be encouraged where there is clear evidence of the style and design of the originals but wholly conjectural restoration schemes will be resisted. Similarly it will be considered unacceptable to introduce new such features which would be too grand for the property or floor in question. For example, a grand marble fireplace or heavily moulded door would not be appropriate in the basement or upper floors of a townhouse. Nor should a cornice moulding be introduced to a simple attic storey room. Similarly, standard mouldings or doors should not be fitted throughout all floors.

## Floor Surfaces

In all cases the original floorboards should be retained, with new boards matched in where existing ones are split. The floorboards may be over-boarded provided that the new surface is easily reversible but careful consideration will be given to the likely impact of this upon doors and skirtings. Original floor tiling in entrance halls or to hearths should similarly be retained but may be carpeted over where desired (taking care not to damage these surfaces when fixing gripper strips). Brick paver, stone flag or clay tile floors in basements must again be retained. Where damp proofing of the floor is demonstrated as being necessary the brick, stone or tile must be re-laid on the new surface.

## CONVERSION, CHANGE OF USE & INTENSIFICATION OF USE

### Change of Use

Where there are proposals to change the use of a listed building the impact of the new use on the character of the interior must be fully considered at the outset. A few interiors may be so historically intact and of such architectural quality as to warrant refusal to conversion, but others can be sympathetically converted to a new use provided that a rigid approach is not imposed upon the building.

Few grand townhouses still remain in single occupancy and in those cases where they do it is unlikely that permission would now be granted for conversion to self-contained flats as the requirements of the Building Regulations are likely to lead to harmful intervention in the building. This is also likely to apply to buildings which have been in use as small offices where the original interior largely survives intact and is of good architectural quality.

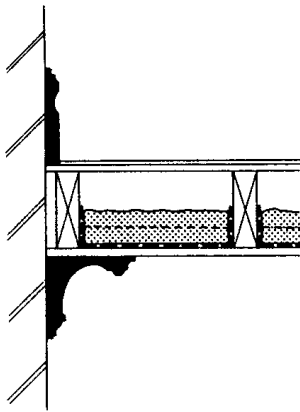
### Conversion or Intensification of Existing Use

Proposals for a more intensive use of a listed building will be considered with caution. It is likely that the number of residential units which a listed building can accommodate will normally be less than with an unlisted building, or the number of bedrooms in each unit will need to be less. The same will apply to properties in hotel or guest house use where additional bedrooms or facilities are proposed. Schemes which over-intensively sub-divide a listed building will be refused. For example, it may be more appropriate in larger properties to use the upper two or three floors as a maisonette, but the introduction of a new staircase to create a maisonette at lower level will normally be unacceptable.

The main staircase and entrance hall are particularly important and the hallway should not be divided by partitions or screens to create separate flat entrances. The staircase balustrade and handrail should never be removed and replaced with solid infill partitioning. Where the property has a rear extension or service wing this is usually the most appropriate location for bathrooms. En suite facilities for each bedroom will normally be unacceptable in a listed building as this would involve an inappropriate degree of subdivision.

The principle rooms at ground and first floor level should normally remain undivided and lobbies should be avoided in these rooms. However, 'galley' kitchens within front rooms will often be acceptable provided that they can be mechanically ventilated and serviced without visually harmful ducting or piping. False ceilings will not normally be acceptable except within small bathrooms and lobbies.

Situations may also arise where a particular use requires the carrying out of significant works to upgrade it to meet current standards under the Housing Act or fire safety regulations or to meet the relevant standards for hotel/guest house accreditation. Whilst the council will be sympathetic to the need for such works there will be cases where the extent of the works required would cause serious harm to the character of the interior and in such cases an alternative use for the building may have to be considered.



*Fire resistance measures can be incorporated into a floor or ceiling without disturbing existing cornices, skirtings, or decorative ceilings.*

## Building Regulations

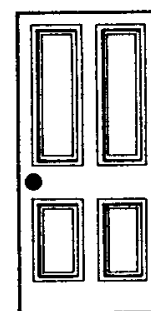
Before submitting an application for the conversion (or other alteration) of a listed building the full implication of the Building Regulations on the proposal should be investigated and all likely requirements of those Regulations should be shown on the listed building consent plans. This will include requirements for fire precautions, means of escape, soundproofing, mechanical ventilation and waste and soil vent pipes. The siting of kitchens and bathrooms will be particularly important as these will normally require mechanical ventilation as well as waste and vent pipes (which should not exit on the street frontage). Boxed-in ducts running through rooms at high level will almost always be unacceptable. Soundproofing and fireproofing works must be carried out in such a way that ceilings and decorative cornices are undisturbed; utilising the floor/ceiling void will usually form part of the solution. Where there is a clear conflict between the Building Regulations and conservation policy, there may be an opportunity to seek a relaxation of the Building Regulations in some cases.

## FIRE PRECAUTION WORKS

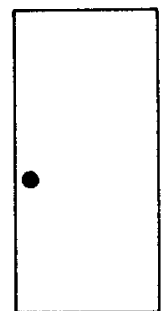
The council has prepared a separate, detailed advice sheet on fire precaution works to historic buildings so only a brief summary of policy advice is given here. Fire precaution works will normally require listed building consent unless the works are very minor in scope within a plain or much-altered interior. (Minor works would include the installation of an alarm system where all wiring is to be concealed, the fitting of deeper door stops and the use of intumescent paint on doors).

The cumulative effect of a large number of minor alterations, however, can result in a serious loss of character. Where fire precaution works to a listed building would lead to an unacceptable loss of character consent will be refused. Conversely, a scheme which offers a range of reinstatements (such as removal of modern sub-partitioning and lobbies, removal of overboarding from original paneled doors, or removal of flush doors and the reinstatement of paneled doors to match the originals) can be taken into account in considering the overall impact of the proposals on the character of the building.

The introduction of fire lobbies should be avoided wherever possible, particularly in principal rooms and on stairwells. Where they are judged acceptable they should not normally be full height but should terminate at picture rail height, so that any cornice can remain visible in its entirety. Lobby door size and design and architrave detail must have a clear relationship to the original openings and to the proportions of the room as a whole. Existing paneled doors should not be replaced or wholly over-boarded to achieve the necessary fire resistance but instead the panels should be appropriately upgraded (preferably using an intumescent membrane), reusing or matching the panel mouldings. The only exceptions allowed will be for very thin doors or in those cases where one hour fire resistance is an unavoidable requirement. In such cases the new doors should be purpose made paneled doors to match the original proportions and detail. Door closers must be of the concealed mortice type; overhead closers are unsightly and are normally unacceptable.



**YES**



**NO**

*Fire-proofed panelled doors are available.*

Smoke and heat detectors, fire alarms and emergency lighting fittings etc. should be sited as unobtrusively and sensitively as possible, usually in corners of rooms or centered over doors, avoiding any decorative mouldings. They should not be randomly scattered over walls. Control panels should normally be sited just inside the entrance below dado level, and adjacent to meter cupboards if possible, again avoiding any decorative features. The wiring and cabling should normally be chased into walls and run in floor/ceiling voids, not surface run. An

exception will be where surface wiring is the only way of bypassing a stone staircase and in such circumstances the wiring should be neatly clipped in corners but not run in mini trunking. In the case of particularly fine or decorative interiors where extensive new wiring would cause serious harm the council will require the use of radio controlled alarm systems.

## **OTHER RELATED PUBLICATIONS**

The council has also produced Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes on '*Listed Buildings – General Advice*' and '*External Paint Finishes and Colours*'. There are Information Sheets on '*Window Repair and Replacement*', '*Damp and Timber Treatment*', '*Fire Precaution Works*', and '*Burglar Alarms and Historic Buildings*' plus various lists of specialist craftsmen, amongst others. All are available from the address at the head of this Guidance Note.

The illustration on page 5 is of the original basement at number 10 Brunswick Square, Hove and has been reproduced by courtesy of The Regency Town House, 13 Brunswick Square, Hove, BN3 1EH, tel. (01273) 206306, from their guidebook.