

## MONITORING THE EFFECT OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONTROLS IN LONDON

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### CONTROL OF CHANGE

The original impetus for the development of the Monitor of historic building controls was the dramatic increase in the number of buildings and monuments in the U.K. that are subject to historic building legislation. This resulted from the re-survey of historic buildings which was started a decade ago and is now virtually complete. By 1988 the "list" for England will contain well over one million individual buildings, (a five-fold increase); and the annual value of controlled development is likely to be in the region of £3,000-4,000 million, (about \$5,000 million).

Legislation affecting these historic properties does so by controlling how they are changed. Specifically, controls are intended to prevent unwanted change; but, conversely, they also define acceptable change. In the United Kingdom the overwhelming majority of controlled buildings are in private ownership. As a result the majority of changes occur because the owner wishes to modify his property for his own purposes.

Where the owner's interest conflicts with the architectural or historic interest of the building the issue is resolved by democratic processes. The owner's interest is weighed against the wider conservation interests of society, and alterations which are permitted as a result of this consideration broadly can be defined as 'acceptable change'. Each time the legislative control operates it confirms or redefines acceptable change.

About 10% of the controlled development in England occurs in the Greater London area. In order to establish a clearer picture of the effect of historic building legislation, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England has started to operate a computerised monitor of listed building control in the metropolis.

### THE ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUE

The enlarged list raises new policy and strategy issues for the control of change. In particular it highlights the fact that, although professional conservators can usually provide detailed descriptions of changes to individual buildings, they are less articulate when it comes to describing how change affects classes of buildings.

It is not difficult to illustrate this difference. Any contemporary alteration to a listed building is recorded by drawings and a brief description which are kept in the archive of the local authority. There may also be photographs and a report. For some buildings the documentation will be very detailed, including research papers, technical studies, detailed specifications, etc. Normally it will be possible to have a comprehensive answer to the question: "What has happened to this building?".

However wider enquiries, such as the question "Are historic building controls applied consistently by different local authorities across the country?", or "What was the effect of the conservation process this year, and how does that compare with its effect in previous years?" can only be answered in vague terms at present. Even questions relating to specific alterations, such as "Was this work typical or untypical?", (i.e. "How does this work compare with alterations to other buildings of the same age and type?"), cannot be answered with any degree of precision.

The reason for this is that an articulate digest of what is happening to historic buildings, either as a generality or in particular groups or classes, simply does not exist. There is no analysis of the patterns of change that affect historic buildings. Even analysis of the distribution of building types remains at a rudimentary stage.

The need to describe the effect of architectural conservation is not an end in itself. The absence of an articulate digest is only a matter of concern to the extent that it impedes good administration. But the large number of alterations permitted each year, (now perhaps 70,000) raises major issues concerning the consistency of legislative controls and the effective deployment of limited resources. This is the context in which the Monitor has evolved.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE MONITOR

### (a) Definition of the area of interest

The Monitor has two parts. The first part is a formalised description of the buildings' intrinsic characteristics, (what is being changed); the second is a formalised description of the alterations, (the change itself).

There are five key intrinsic characteristics, although numerous others may also play a part in defining an area of interest. The key characteristics are: date, original use, form, scale, construction & materials.

The description of alterations is an assessment of the impact of change on the special interest of a particular building. It summarises the nature and type of change, including a formalised estimate of the degree to which key elements are affected by change. Important parts of this summary are the two subjective scales of change illustrated in Appendix A. A worked example of monitored information is contained in the draft authorisation form illustrated in Appendix B.

#### (b) Analysis

The analysis stage identifies patterns of change. The majority of requests for data analysis are likely to arise from the conservator's hope that his records of past cases will yield useful information. The real problems are mathematically vague, but tangible: "What lessons are to be learned from past experience for future conservation practice? How do particular patterns of change affect distinct classes of buildings? What is the appropriate response to an application for a particular type of alteration?"

Analytical difficulties may arise where a particular type of alteration occurs infrequently; or, as is often the case, where it occurs in combination with other changes. The degree to which the same alteration affects different buildings may vary from case to case. To compound these difficulties, the monitored information will often be inadequate: the description of individual alterations may be ambiguous and ill-conceived; data may embody histories of misunderstandings (both professional and administrative). In short, the data analyst's nightmare: imperfect information and vague problems.

Nevertheless the analytical process is focussed by the need to produce information that is directly useful for the day to day administration of historic buildings.

#### (c) Definition of policy and strategy

The interpretation of information from the Monitor is intended to affect the administration of historic buildings in three broad areas:

- firstly it should help to ensure that historic building controls are applied consistently;
- secondly it should help to identify target areas so that limited resources can be deployed effectively;
- thirdly it should assist in the creation and implementation of policy and strategy.

#### (d) Implementation

When an application to alter a listed building is received, the Monitor is designed to perform two functions:

1. It automatically warns the case officer when the building is subject to established policies so that these are taken into consideration in the determination of an application.

Established policies are classified according to the significance of the conservation issue, from the most informal to the most politically sensitive.

2. The monitor should also be readily available for consultation by the case officer so that the particular case can be seen in the context of other comparable applications.

## CONCLUSION

The philosophy underlying the Monitor is that opinions about what ought to happen to historic buildings are no substitute for accurate information about what is actually happening to them.

The ability to identify patterns and trends showing how historic buildings are being changed is an important aid for conservation authorities working to maintain and improve the effectiveness of historic building controls. For conservators it should provide background and context for the management of applications to alter buildings; and it will indicate priorities for the management of their workloads. For political authorities it should provide the background and context for taking decisions, thereby increasing the consistency with which historic building legislation is administered. It will be an effective tool for the pursuit of historic building policies and strategies.

DEGREE OF CHANGE SCALE A

The following interpretation of scale A is intended as a guide only. Application of the scale should reflect how the existing interest of a particular building would be affected by the proposed alteration.

"TO WHAT DEGREE IS THE EXISTING SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC INTEREST OF THE PROPERTY ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY THIS PROPOSAL ?"

1. very slight change
2. minor change
3. simple alterations which do not directly affect elements of interest
4. alterations having marginal impact on elements of interest
5. alterations having noticeable impact on elements of interest
6. elements of interest generally intact, with occasional losses
7. substantial or complete loss of some elements of interest, but over 50% remaining generally intact
8. major alterations involving substantial change to over 50% of elements of interest
9. loss of majority of elements of interest
10. complete loss with the exception of a vestigial feature

DEGREE OF CHANGE : SCALE B

"TO WHAT DEGREE DO THE PROPOSALS INVOLVE RESTORATION OR CONJECTURAL REINSTATEMENT OF MISSING OR MUTILATED FEATURES?"

- A. not at all
- B. to a small degree
- C. to a moderate degree
- D. to a high degree

**Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission**

DRAFT COPY

**LISTED BUILDING DECISION**

**The London Division**

Chesham House, 30 Warwick Street, W.1.  
Telephone 01-734 8144 ext 126

Our reference LD / 2960 / 19  
Your reference TP / 1234

Case officer **RF**  
delegated / chairman's action / committee

To

**D. P. T.  
Westminster**

Address of property \*(number of listed buildings **1**)

**21 Essex Road  
Westminster**

Date of application **12 Jan. 1985**  
Date of referral by L.A. **28 Jan. 1985**  
Our register date **2 Feb. 1985**

**SCHEDULE**

Proposals / Description of change.

**Rear lift extension; modifications to mansard roof; & internal refurbishment for office use.**

Applicant's drawing nos. **ER / 100 / 12, 3, 11, 12, 13 and 14.**

**AFFECTED AREAS OF EXISTING BUILDING**  
(\*One l. b. only)

OMIT THIS SECTION FOR MULT. APPLS.: USE HBMC/LD 2

		SMR Ref		c		s/c	
<b>EXTERNAL</b>		FRONT ELEVATION	REAR ELEVATION	FLANK / PARTY WALLS	ROOF	ANCILLARY	
			<b>5 A</b>		<b>4 A</b>		
<b>INTERNAL</b>		PRINCIPAL ROOMS	SECONDARY ROOMS	PRINCIPAL CIRCULATION	SECONDARY CIRCULATION	ANCILLARY	
GND FL				<b>3 A</b>			
1ST FL				<b>3 A</b>			
OTHER			<b>5 A</b>	<b>3 A</b>			
<b>EXTERNAL ITEMS</b>	FRONT EXTN <input type="checkbox"/>	REAR EXTN <input type="checkbox"/>	FLANK EXTN <input type="checkbox"/>	ROOF EXTN <input type="checkbox"/>	OPENINGS <input type="checkbox"/>	SHOPFRONT <input type="checkbox"/>	SIGNS <input type="checkbox"/>
					LIFT EXTN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
					INTERNAL STRUCTURE	SUBDIVIDE <input type="checkbox"/>	OPEN UP <input type="checkbox"/>
					LATERAL CONVY <input type="checkbox"/>	INTERNAL LIFT <input type="checkbox"/>	STRENGTHENING <input type="checkbox"/>
					STAIR <input type="checkbox"/>		
					INT. FINISHES OF SPECIAL INTEREST	JOINERY <input type="checkbox"/>	PLASTERWORK <input type="checkbox"/>
						DECORATION <input type="checkbox"/>	STAIR <input type="checkbox"/>
						FIREPLACE <input type="checkbox"/>	

**EXISTING USE**

PRINCIPAL (1) **COO**

SECONDARY (2) **FPR**

(3) **-**

**PROPOSED USE**

PRINCIPAL (1) **COO**

SECONDARY (2) **-**

(3) **-**

**DEMOLITION (P or C)**

**DECISION**

Type of authorisation - delete as appropriate

1. Standard Authorisation
2. Special instructions

DISCARD SUPERCEDED DRAWINGS AT THIS STAGE

Authorising officer

Date of top copy

HBMC/LD/1

## Summary

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1. During the last decade the resurvey of historic buildings in the United Kingdom has substantially increased the number of "listed" buildings subject to legislative controls. By 1988 the total in England will be over one million.
2. The problem of administering these buildings has increased in parallel with the rise in their numbers. In 1987 the value of controlled development in England is likely to be between  $\frac{1}{2}$ 3,000-4,000 million, (about \$5,000 million).
3. About 10% of this controlled development occurs in the Greater London area. In order to establish a clearer picture of the effect of historic building legislation, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England is operating a computerised monitor of all listed buildings in the metropolis.
4. Most historic building legislation is intended to control change. Specifically, controls are intended to prevent unwanted change; but conversely they also define acceptable change. So the monitor is designed to describe how buildings change.
5. The monitor has two parts. The first part is a formalised description of the buildings, making it possible to analyse their characteristics, (such as date, use, form, scale, construction & materials, etc.). The second part is a formalised description of alterations: this includes the nature and type of change, and an assessment of the severity of its effect on the the "special interest" of the building.
6. The Monitor is designed to have a direct effect on the day to day administration of historic buildings. It reveals the type and severity of alterations, and how they vary from time to time, from place to place, and from building type to building type. By revealing patterns of change it
  - (i) ensures that historic building controls are applied consistently;
  - (ii) identifies target areas so that limited resources can be deployed effectively; and
  - (iii) permits the creation and implementation of policy and strategy.

UN SYSTÈME DE SURVEILLANCE CONCERNANT LES MONUMENTS HISTORIQUES  
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1. Au cours des dix dernières années la nouvelle étude des monuments historiques dans le Royaume Uni a considérablement augmenté le nombre de monuments classés soumis au contrôle législatif. D'ici 1988 le total dépassera le million.
2. Le problème administratif engendré par ces monuments croît en proportion de leur nombre. En 1987 on prévoit que le montant des aménagements contrôlés en Angleterre sera de l'ordre de 3,000 à 4,000 millions de livres sterling (environ 5,000 millions de dollars).
3. Dans les 10% de cet aménagement contrôlé a lieu dans la région de Londres et de sa grande banlieue. Afin de clarifier la situation quant aux effets de la législation sur le développement des monuments historiques, The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England opère un système de surveillance informatisée concernant tous les monuments historiques répertoriés dans la métropole.
4. La plus grande partie de la législation concernant les monuments historiques a pour but de réglementer les modifications. La législation est tout particulièrement conçue pour interdire les changements indésirables. En revanche, ils définissent également les modifications susceptibles d'être acceptées. Ainsi le système est-il conçu pour définir les éléments qui entrent dans la transformation des monuments.
5. Ce système se divise en deux parties. La première partie est une description systématique des monuments, rendant possible l'analyse de leurs caractéristiques (comme par exemple : dates, utilisation, forme, taille, genre de construction et matériaux utilisés). La seconde partie est la description systématique des modifications : ceci inclus la nature et le caractère de ces dernières, ainsi que l'évaluation de l'ampleur de leurs effets sur ce qui constitue l'intérêt particulier à ce monument.
6. Le système est conçu pour effectuer directement, au jour le jour, l'administration des monuments historiques. Il met en lumière le caractère et l'étendue des changements ainsi que leurs variations d'une époque à une autre, d'un endroit à un autre, et d'un genre de construction à un autre. En montrant l'évolution des modifications le système :
  - (i) assure l'application consistante de la réglementation en vigueur en ce qui concerne les monuments historiques;
  - (ii) reconnaît les objectifs afin que des ressources limitées puissent être déployées avec efficacité;
  - (iii) permet la création et la réalisation d'une ligne d'action et d'une stratégie.