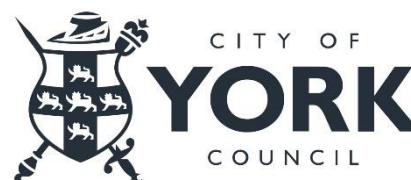


Historic Windows. Planning, Design and Conservation Guidance Note, December 2025



Aims of this note

1. This note is a very brief overview for the general public for those seeking good practice guidance when caring for historic windows and considering change. For detailed guidance a selection of references and links are provided at the end.
2. When referring to “historic windows” this normally means aged timber windows of traditional design and construction, that contribute to the building’s special interest, but it can include more recent authentic replacement timber windows that also contribute in this way. It can also include early steel framed windows.
3. “Historic glazing” refers to glass produced before modern float glass. This usually pre dates the 1950s and signs of this glass include mild visual distortions.

Overview

4. *“The loss of traditional windows from our older buildings poses one of the major threats to our heritage. Traditional windows and their glazing make an important contribution to the significance of historic areas. They are an integral part of the design of older buildings and can be important artefacts in their own right, often made with great skill and ingenuity with materials of a higher quality than are generally available today. The distinctive appearance of historic hand-made glass is not easily imitated in modern glazing.”* (Historic England: Traditional Windows, Their care, Repair & Upgrading. Feb 2017)
5. Therefore loss of historic windows needs careful consideration and may not be supported. Section 3 gives brief guidance for different types of work.

6. Regular care and maintenance reduces the need for costly interventions at a later date. A well maintained window with good draft proofing will also perform better for thermal comfort.
7. Try to be objective about thermal performance and carbon reduction, so decisions can be based on facts and not assumptions or incomplete company marketing perspectives. For instance adding internal secondary glazing can reduce heat loss comparable to some new double glazing. As another example, the embodied energy of uPVC windows and the need to replace these units over time, can have worse carbon impacts compared to retaining single glazed timber windows in good condition when introducing other window upgrades. Historic England's *Know Your home, Know Your Carbon* is a good guide on this subject.
8. Changes to windows can impact on condensation and damp throughout the building. Glazing should be the coldest part of an external wall, so if replacing windows improves their thermal efficiency and reduces airflow in damp buildings, then condensation can be transferred to other parts of the building, potentially hidden within walls, and this can lead to rapid decay of historic fabric. So proposals for windows might need to be considered together with other building changes to avoid problems.
9. Different types of change to windows have different degrees of carbon benefits and different degrees of impact, and so an optimal balance between these factors should be sought. This usually means retaining existing fabric and minimising interventions, where possible.
10. For certainty on permissions and detailed advice on adapting windows please consult with the local planning authority (LPA), particularly for listed buildings. We recommend using a preapplication advice service, or listed building consent application, if appropriate.

Types of work

11. Painting windows

- Impact: Low
 - Permissions: Where not a listed building in a conservation area this will not normally require permission. Where a listed building, houses or commercial buildings this will also not normally require permission, particularly if using the same colour or muted tones. Painting shopfronts will not normally require permission and more flexibility is generally considered for colour choice.
12. Repairing windows on a listed building:
- Impact: Low
 - Permissions: Replacement of small timber elements such as a rotted sill with quality new timber, matched profiles, and a good standard of work will not require permission. Repair of broken/cracked glass will not require permission when replaced with similar glass ie single glazing replaced with single glazing. Draught proofing does not usually require permission.
 - Comment: Often windows look in worse condition than they actually are. Repairs should seek minimal intervention.
13. Adding internal secondary glazing, listed building
- Impact: Low
 - Permissions: A good design choice and frame position are important. Conversely, bad choices can cause unacceptable harm. For a clear recommendation on permissions, seek advice from the LPA.
 - Comment: Secondary glazing is usually a preferred method of improving thermal/sound/comfort performance of single glazed windows because if well designed, it will only have limited impacts on historic fabric. It can also achieve comparable performance to replacement new double glazed timber windows with correct design choice (including Low-E glass type). If subdivision of secondary glazing is needed, the proportions/frames should align with the external windows e.g glazing bars should line through etc. There are rare exceptions where internal secondary glazing is not recommended: For

instance, there might be unacceptable impacts on internal shutters or historic joinery.

14. Replacement of existing glazing with slimline or vacuum double glazing whilst keeping existing frames, listed building

- Impact: Medium
- Permissions: Will require listed building consent unless replacing panes within a clearly modern window.
- Comment: When permission is required this proposal is usually acceptable if the following circumstances apply: (1) windows are not leaded lights; (2) windows don't contain historic glass; (3) window frames can accommodate any additional rebate necessary to install replacement glazing in the same outer face position. These types of units are thicker and heavier and should not compromise the long term stability of existing frames, including a consideration of the need for future intervention and replacement.

15. Replacement of existing windows with double glazed windows, listed building

- Impact: High
- Permissions: Is highly likely to require listed building consent.
- Comment: When permission is required, an application will consider the contribution existing windows have on the building's special interest. For instance, if the windows are recent and don't contribute to a building's special interest then their replacement in double glazing with an appropriate design can be neutral or positive. Alternatively, windows that contribute to a building's special interest are important to retain rather than replace, and replacement will not usually be supported.
- Comment: Where a replacement is agreed in principle then design, detail and materials will be important. For instance, expect uPVC not to be an acceptable material for windows in a listed building.

16. Replacement of existing historic windows with double or triple glazed windows, not a listed building but in a conservation area

- Impact: Medium
- Permissions: The need for permissions vary. As a guide, they are generally more permissive than those for listed buildings. Most unlisted houses have permitted development rights to replace windows if considered by the planning authority (not the owner) to be a like-for-like replacement. Checking with the LPA what like-for-like means in detail is recommended as it is subject to interpretation. Regardless of standard permitted development rules, some houses might be in an area that have certain rights removed by an Article 4 direction. Also, permitted development rights afforded to houses do not apply to other building types like flats or commercial buildings.
- Comment: Good practice guidance for maintaining historic windows in listed buildings is also useful to inform proposals for historic windows in unlisted buildings, regardless of the need for permissions.
- Comment: When permission is required, replacements are usually supported, subject to good design. One guiding consideration will be the impact the proposal has on the special interest of the conservation area. For instance, if traditional timber windows contribute to the special interest of the area and are the dominant window type, then a replacement window should also be a traditional design type. This usually means a window of timber construction (uPVC is usually unable to replicate the design detail and glazing bar proportion of traditional timber windows). Double or triple glazing will usually be supported.

Further information

17. The following are a selection of guides containing more detailed information on the general care of historic windows
18. Historic England:
 - [“Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency”](#), July 2024 (HEAN 18)

- [“Traditional Windows: their care, repair and upgrading”](#), Feb 2017
 - [“Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Draught-proofing windows and doors”](#), April 2016
 - [“Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Insulating dormer windows”](#), April 2016
 - [“Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Secondary glazing for windows”](#), April 2016
19. Historic Environment Scotland
- [“Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Windows”](#), Feb 2020
20. Department for Communities, Northern Ireland
- [“Guidance for Historic Windows”](#), June 2024