



The conservation movement began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was led by William Morris who was concerned about the 'restoration' practices of the day. He felt that instead of buildings being restored to look like new, they should reflect their age and repairs should be minimal. In 1877, Morris set up the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), which was followed by the National Trust in 1895 and other amenity societies in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Conservation principles and planning legislation developed gradually to reflect the importance of historic buildings within the built environment. After World War II, a large number of country houses were being demolished and this acted as a catalyst for more robust legislation. A statutory list of important buildings was drawn up and listed building consent was required for works to them. Today there are many heritage organisations working in the field of conservation and some common principles have emerged relating to how historic buildings should be treated.

### War Memorials Trust principles

The Trust upholds the common conservation principles outlined below but recognises that war memorials sometimes need to be treated differently. This is because they are more than historic or artistic monuments – they have an important commemorative function too. It can be difficult to reconcile all the different aspects of war memorials when making conservation decisions. For example, the Trust puts special emphasis on the legibility of names and will support re-cutting or replacement in situations where names cannot be read. It also supports changes to war memorials such the addition of plaques for new names. However, the Trust will only support cleaning when the dirt is making inscriptions illegible and would not recommend cleaning every year for reasons explained above.

### Common conservation principles

**Minimal intervention** – This means only undertaking works that really need to be done. For example, only cleaning the memorial when the inscriptions become illegible rather than cleaning it every year. Taking this approach means the memorial will have a longer lifespan because the surface is not actively being worn away on a regular basis. Therefore, the memorial will be around for future generations to use. For more information, see War Memorials Trust's helpsheet 'Conservation of stone'.

**Retention of original fabric** – This means removing as little of the original memorial as possible. For example, not undertaking abrasive cleaning which would remove the surface of stone; not removing original features if they are still performing their function; or not replacing features if they can be repaired.

War Memorials Trust 70 Cowcross Street London EC1M 6EJ

Telephone: 020 7233 7356 / 0300 123 0764

Email: [conservation@warmemorials.org](mailto:conservation@warmemorials.org) Website: [www.warmemorials.org](http://www.warmemorials.org)

Registered Charity Commission Number: 1201442

© War Memorials Trust, 2025

The rationale behind this principle is that original fabric has a value in itself and if a memorial is changed too much, it no longer has the same historic character and meaning as when it was erected.

**Historical basis for repair** – This means respecting the integrity and authenticity of the original design and materials. Only undertaking repairs based on historic evidence (material and photographic) rather than speculative works. For example, if a bronze figure has been stolen, research may uncover some photographs of it, or the original moulds, which will enable an exact replica to be made. The reason why this is important is that memorial designs were specially chosen by those who set them up and represent the views of people at the time. It is important to respect these choices so that future generations can look back on memorials as authentic representations of the time.

**Like for like repairs** – This means only using materials that would have been originally used on the memorial. For example, replacing limestone panels with the same or similar type of limestone rather than new granite, which is extremely heavy and not part of the original design. This principle also extends to the use of traditional skills and tools e.g. hand-cutting lettering rather than sand-blasting. The main reason behind this principle is that it is better for the memorial physically and aesthetically to have a coherent set of materials. There will be fewer structural and repair problems if a similar type of material is used throughout.

**Reversability of techniques** – This means not doing any works which cause irreversible damage. For example, using cement on a weathered stone or brick memorial is likely to cause damage to these materials because it is too hard and strong in comparison to the lime mortars which were used historically. For more information, see War Memorials Trust's helpsheet 'Mortars and war memorials'.

## Other organisations

Other organisations have detailed versions of their own conservation principles, the details of which are below.

### Cadw

The Welsh Assembly Government's historic environment division outlines the approach in Wales within 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance'.

The document can be downloaded from:

<http://cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/conservation/conservationprinciples/>

### Historic England

The Government's statutory adviser on the historic environment in England outlines its approach within 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' (published April 2008).

A summary of the guidance and the document itself can be downloaded from: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/constructive-conservation/conservation-principles>

## **Historic Environment Scotland**

The executive agency of the Scottish Government does not have one document which explains its principles. However, it is possible to access the free range of Inform Guides which outline technical guidance.

To view the guides online visit: [www.engineshed.org/publications/?publication\\_type=36](http://www.engineshed.org/publications/?publication_type=36)

## **Northern Ireland Department for Communities**

The Department for Communities is responsible for listing, scheduling and designating which are added to the Buildings Database. Local authorities and the Department of Infrastructure are responsible for managing planning functions.

Any enquiries regarding conservation policy in Northern Ireland should be made to: Department for Communities, Historic Environment Division, Causeway Exchange, 1-7 Bedford Street, Town Parks, Belfast, BT2 7EG E: [historicenvironmentenquiries@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:historicenvironmentenquiries@communities-ni.gov.uk) W: [www.communities-ni.gov.uk/contacts/historic-environment-contacts](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/contacts/historic-environment-contacts)

## **The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)**

This is an independent charity which provides advice about historic buildings. It outlines its principles on its website and generally follows an approach of minimal repairs rather than 'restoration'.

You can read the principles here [www.spab.org.uk/what-is-spab-/spab-s-purpose/](http://www.spab.org.uk/what-is-spab-/spab-s-purpose/)  
To contact SPAB directly: SPAB, 37 Spital Square, London, E1 6DY, telephone 020 7377 1644

## **Local authorities**

Planning policy in local authorities is guided by the National Planning Policy Framework which is set by central government. This provides guidance on drawing up local plans and making decisions about planning applications. Section 12 of the Framework specifically focuses on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. The National Planning Policy Framework can be found online at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2).

Central government also produces planning practice guidance to support the framework and this updated regularly. Planning practice guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>.

Please note that this helpsheet is intended to offer informal advice and is a distillation of experience. The information contained in this helpsheet is not exhaustive and other sources of information are available.