

Sustaining cultural heritage for the future

DANIEL MARTIN discusses building conservation and introduces the new RICS guidance note

Over half of the railway stations in Britain are listed buildings, creating a repair, maintenance and improvement challenge for senior executives and management in balancing the functional priorities of their buildings with pressures to fit in with conservation regulations.

In addition to the listed stations, over a thousand also sit in conservation areas. Both of these designations affect what permissions need to be sought when carrying out renovation and regeneration works. To comply with planning legislation, building owners and managers must apply for consent to carry out any work that involves dismantling all or part of a building; or altering or extending a building in a way that would affect its character.

Station buildings, by their nature, need to be highly functional, with the priority being getting customers in and out quickly and safely. However, it is important to bear in mind that the railway network is an important part of our built heritage and that conserving parts of it does not need to be an obstacle to efficiency and safety, but an opportunity to create an exciting space for its users. One of the guiding principles of building conservation is sustaining cultural heritage for the future, by ensuring that it has a role in community life. Retaining the character of a building's past creates a sense of belonging.

Taking an informed conservation approach can also prove to be more cost effective in the long term than reactive quick fix solutions. There needs to be an acceptance that ongoing maintenance is crucial to protect a heritage asset. Maintenance when viewed from a conservation perspective needs to focus on retaining the special character and interest of the property. It requires putting together a strategic plan for maintenance, which has the added benefit of potentially delivering significant cost savings.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) has just launched its first guidance note on Historic Building Conservation which highlights a number of key issues and



potential benefits regarding the maintenance management for listed buildings and conservation projects.

The key issue to consider in maintenance work is how it can be carried out with minimal intervention using like for like and sympathetic repairs that protect the material and aesthetic

importance of the building.

Any construction project on a listed building should be considered a conservation project, even if the conservation element is a side issue and not the driving force behind the need for works. An extension to a building will need to be done in a manner that is sympathetic to the heritage aspects of the original building. Equally, improvements to an existing building will need to show that conservation of the materials and design referred to in the listed status has been considered.

There is no doubt that conservation projects can be especially demanding and they can require significant commitment in time and effort to resolve. What is more, every repair or alteration to a historic property will have its own individual issues that can be totally unique to that specific project. Historic buildings generally require an above-average standard of workmanship, often needing to make use of specialist materials, tools and construction methods. The same can be said of railway stations themselves, which tend to be highly engineered buildings designed for a specific purpose, that need specialist contractors to deliver a high quality of work.

Giving consideration to the conservation elements of a building in advance of any work being planned can go a long way to help building managers meet all the practical demands of the property as well ensuring that building regulations are adhered to, costs are reduced and the significance of the building or structure is preserved. ■



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