

Why are the listed buildings so expensive to convert?

Higher costs generally for listed buildings

1. Renovating and converting a listed property requires specific skills and materials which can be costly. Renovation and repair work tends to take longer because of the building materials used. Modern property tends to use relatively cheap and quick building solutions, whereas listed properties with older materials will need specialist tradesmen using traditional methods and the need to specially source materials, which is a much more costly and timely affair.
2. Many mainstream developers will not take on conversion or refurbishment of listed buildings, because of the risk or fear of the unknown. Sometimes this is due to lack of knowledge or experience, which is reflected in the cost of hiring in specialists and the higher cost and difficulty of sourcing suitable building materials. Also it is the case that there can be no certainty as to cost. Obtaining fixed prices may not be possible without large premiums or contingency sums added, particularly where the area of work is not fully visible beforehand.
3. Listed buildings are likely to require greater time/cost and attention to detail in order to be verified and signed off by a local authority conservation officer.

Restoration works - Southleigh Park House

4. While the external fabric of the Main House and West Wing may appear to be in good condition (this partly because the site tenant recently painted all the exterior joinery), the restoration work was done almost 20 years ago, so there is work to do. In any case it was only the Main House and the south elevation of the West Wing that were restored. The exterior of the other elevations of the West Wing, the Coach House and the Stable Block were not restored.
5. Internally the Main House was converted to office use, the West Wing remains as a shell in poor condition and the Coach House and Stable Block were not restored internally. The interiors of all of these buildings now need to be sensitively converted to residential use.
6. The proposed layout for the Main House is not the most straightforward in building terms, nor does it optimise sales values. What it does do is to meet the Conservation Officer's requirements to convert the listed buildings to residential minimising the impact on the building's special architectural/historic interest.

Conversion works – Southleigh Park House

7. The residential conversion work is not easy e.g. inserting numerous kitchens and bathrooms and threading the associated modern mechanical and electrical (M&E) services discreetly through the buildings. There is substantial amount of partitioning required and new staircases. It is not straightforward to upgrade the buildings to residential Building Regulations requirements – notably fire, thermal and sound insulation regulations. In addition, the developer will need to obtain NHBC certification

(or similar) for the conversion works and to meet the exacting standards required to attract prospective residential purchasers. Overarching of all of this the conversion will need to meet the high-quality specification required by the Conservation Officer for these listed buildings.

Cost of conversion works – Southleigh Park House

8. The conversion works are not straightforward, needing to respond to the listed status and aesthetic of the existing properties whilst ensuring compliance with the appropriate statutory requirements. These works are detailed and complex due to the existing use and the nature of the conversion works.
9. The costs include the sensitive ‘removal’ of the current office elements within the building. This is in itself a labour and management intensive exercise which would require detailed liaison with the conservation officer to ensure the integrity of the listed properties is maintained.
10. The conversion works to provide the residential accommodation are technically challenging. The technical issues in terms of achieving the required acoustic, thermal and fire protection performance of the residential units within the existing property will require careful detailing. The works will need to be undertaken sensitively to ensure the preservation of the listed elements. In particular the works to achieve the required ‘u-values’ (levels of insulation) will be complex. Similarly the works to prevent airborne and impact sound transference, both vertically and horizontally, across the dwellings are constrained by the existing property. This scenario is repeated in terms of the fire protection between dwellings and forming the required protected fire evacuation routes. In addition, the residential units will be individually serviced in terms of heating, ventilation, drainage, water and electricity. Distribution of these services to and within the dwellings will be complicated by the existing property.
11. The design and specification will need to reflect and complement the listed elements. The cost of these works will therefore be proportionately higher due to the materials required and scarcity of labour resource for the specialist trades involved to meet the conservation requirements. As a result of the scope and sensitivity of the conversion works, the management time and supervision costs will also be relatively higher in comparison with a new build or less complex scenario.

Verification of costs

12. The project cost consultant benchmarked the costs for listed building works against other similar conversion projects within a conservation environment so that they are comparable.
13. In reviewing the viability appraisal the DVS identified at para 7.3 of its report that listed buildings are likely to require greater time / cost and attention to detail in order to be verified and signed off by the Listed Building officer, and compared with other similar listed building schemes it has assessed, the base costs appear “slightly conservative”.