

Making Good Disaster Damage

CHAPTER 16



16.1 Disaster Plans

- 16.1.1 In the interest of protecting a historic structure, the development of a disaster plan can be useful, mitigating the endangerment of those parts of the structure which are saved from a fire, flood or other devastation. This could involve compiling an inventory of special architectural features and fixtures, a drawn record or photographs of the building or those parts of it considered as being of special interest. These records should be stored at a separate location, away from the protected structure. Priorities for saving objects or features in the event of disaster can then be made. The inventory could also serve as an archive in the event of a total loss.

16.2 Mitigating the Loss and Salvaging Materials

- 16.2.1 In order to mitigate damage to the protected structure and to minimise the loss of historic fabric, steps need to be taken speedily in the aftermath of a fire or other disaster. Firstly the stability of the remaining fabric should be assessed and the building made structurally stable before access is allowed for other purposes. Where necessary, the fabric of the building should be protected from further damage by weather or decay. This may require the erection of a temporary roof. Provision should be made to facilitate, in an appropriate manner, the drying-out of fabric and contents saturated as a result of fire-fighting measures. Careful consideration should be given to minimising the risk to remaining, and potentially salvageable, elements which could be further damaged through the drying-out process.

- 16.2.2 The building should be made secure against vandalism and all features of value, including architectural fragments and building materials, should be protected and salvaged. Records should be made of the remaining and damaged material and mapped locations of the salvaged debris. An owner or occupier may need to call on specialist expertise regarding methods of storing or conserving salvaged elements such as finishes, joinery or plasterwork.

16.3 Rebuilding After Total Loss

- 16.3.1 In most cases where a disaster such as a fire has caused total, or near total, loss of a historic building, the special interest which led to its inclusion in the RPS may be considered irredeemably lost and the building of a replica replacement will generally



As soon as it is safe to do so, the surviving fabric of a damaged structure should be inspected and measures taken to stabilise it, erecting a temporary roof if necessary and securing the site against unauthorised access



Where a protected structure has suffered devastating or irreparable damage to its special interest through a fire or other disaster, it may often serve little purpose to reconstruct or replicate it, except where a larger architectural design has been affected by the loss or the structure is an important local landmark; in such cases the reinstatement of the exterior or other elements of the structure may be considered

serve little purpose. In such cases, the building should be deleted from the RPS. However, if the building formed part of a larger architectural design such as a terrace, square or other group of buildings or was an important urban or rural landmark, then the reconstruction in replica of at least the exterior of the building may be considered necessary in order to protect the setting of other historic structures or the character of an ACA.

16.4 Partial Loss

- 16.4.1 The total loss of a building in a disaster is very rare. Partial loss of a structure is more common. This is also more problematic and will require a careful assessment of the remaining building fabric. A judgement will need to be formed by the planning authority as to what constituted the special interest of the structure and to what extent that special interest has been compromised by the damage. The effect of the damage on adjacent protected structures or on the character of an ACA should also be considered.
- 16.4.2 The assessment will need to consider the type and extent of the damage and the importance of the damaged portion to the quality of the whole. It may be difficult to identify the point at which the building is so damaged that full reinstatement is neither worthwhile nor desirable. Each case will have to be considered on its own merits, as standard procedures cannot be applied.
- 16.4.3 Where the damaged section of the building is part of an architectural composition, or one which is symmetrical or where the building forms part of a formal composition, then it may be considered essential to reinstate the damaged section fully, or at least externally, even where a substantial proportion of the historic fabric has been lost.

16.5 Reinstatement of Interiors

- 16.5.1 Where the interior of a protected structure is almost entirely lost but the external shell remains substantially intact, the requirement may be to repair or reinstate the exterior fabric but allow the interior to be rebuilt in a different manner. Much will depend on the quality of the interior before the disaster. Where a high-quality interior has been damaged and substantial fragments remain, the recreation of the interior incorporating those surviving fragments may be appropriate, providing this can be done without an undue amount of conjecture.



Many fires are successfully extinguished before major damage occurs, requiring a careful assessment of the remaining fabric to ascertain if its special interest has been compromised. An assessment of the extent of reinstatement appropriate following partial damage will require to be carried out on a case-by-case basis



The true extent of damage to important interiors may be disguised by smoke-blackening and blistered paint. Careful spot cleaning of the stained and blistered surfaces and examination of lath and plaster linings will be needed to establish whether or not decorative interior plasterwork or joinery is capable of repair

