



CARING FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS ADVICE ON PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

Good quality maintenance and repair is essential if we are to hand on our built heritage for the enjoyment of future generations. The Borough Council is keen to encourage the owners of Listed Buildings to adopt best practice in maintaining and repairing their buildings.

Information on the repair of historic buildings is available from English Heritage and SPAB and there are numerous books on the subject but this leaflet highlights the key points to be considered.

- **the principles of repair** - what you should bear in mind when contemplating repairs to an historic building:
- **the purpose of repair** - to restrain the process of decay without damaging character or disturbing/destroying historic fabric.
- **the need for repair** - repair work should be kept to the minimum to stabilise and conserve buildings for the long term and for any appropriate use.
- **avoiding unnecessary damage** - the authenticity of an historic building depends crucially on the integrity of its fabric and design. Repairs should be selective and relate only to the areas which are decayed or damaged.
- **analysing historic development** - the understanding of the development of a building should be preliminary to carrying out repairs, particularly if extensive. Analysis and recording should be carried out before and during the repair programme.
- **analysing the causes of defects** - it is important to understand why a building is failing in some way before attempting repairs, otherwise the same problem(s) may recur.
- **adopting proven techniques** - repairs should aim to match existing materials and methods of construction to preserve the appearance and historic integrity of the building. Modern techniques should only be employed where they have a proven record and/or are necessary to overcome a particular problem where a traditional technique cannot be employed.
- **do not disguise new materials** - repairs should be undertaken honestly, usually without attempting disguise or introduce artificial ageing. Significant repairs benefit from being discreetly dated for future reference.
- **removal of later additions** - additions or alterations normally contributes to the development history of the property and should be retained. If there are

compelling reasons for their removal/change they should be carefully recorded and applications for formal consent made to the local authority.

- **restoration of lost features** - where there is evidence of a lost structural feature this should be reinstated as part of the repair programme. Speculative
- **reconstruction is hardly ever justified.**
- **safeguarding the future** - regularly monitoring the condition of a building and carrying out maintenance work is essential for the future well-being of the building. It is also important that it has an appropriate and sympathetic use.

Maintenance and minor repairs

- **day to day maintenance** - clearing leaves, snow etc from gutters, valleys, parapet gutters, downpipes, gullies and flat roofs should be done about every three months and particularly after the autumn fall of leaves. Failure to attend to this important job is one of the major causes of structural defects associated with water penetration.
- **controlling plant growth** - plant growth on masonry can be injurious to the fabric of the building. It should be removed where there is evidence of damage, particularly when it is young, before the roots gain too much of a hold. Usually a systemic poison needs to be applied to the plant to kill it entirely. The foliage can then be carefully removed to avoid further damage to the fabric of the building.
- **removal of bird droppings** - bird droppings in concentration can result in damage to masonry and timber because of the salts present. They should be removed carefully wearing protective clothes for your health and safety.
- **check for insect and fungal attack** - check timbers for signs of dust caused by wood-boring insects and for fungal brackets or a musty fungal smell. If you have concerns call in a specialist firm who will carry out a survey (usually free of charge) and report on any problems with a price for remedial works.
- **check for adequate ventilation** - make sure the building is well ventilated from cellar to attic. This is necessary to help prevent condensation and outbreaks of fungal attack. If you believe that ventilation is inadequate call in a building surveyor to advise on improvements.

Minor repairs and maintenance involving builder's works

- **minor works to slate and tile roofs** - re-fix the odd slipped tile or slate, or replace with materials to match. Excess moss should be removed because it can harbour dampness which can cause tiles and slates to laminate. Bitumen coatings applied over roofs, or spray-on coating systems on the underside of roofs, should be avoided as they can lead to condensation/fungal attack and

they prevent the future retrieval of good slates and tiles if the roof has to be recovered.

- **repair of existing lead and other metal coverings** - this is the work of specialists. Splits and small holes can often be repaired by lead burning etc provided that the base material has a worthwhile lifespan left. Emergency repairs can be achieved using a propriety adhesive tape but this can only be a short term measure. Bitumen fabrics or glass fibre should not be used as they are not compatible with traditional metal sheeting and degrade through ultra-violet radiation.
- **re-fixing slipped lead or other metal flashings** - where roof and gable, chimney or parapet, upstands come together flashings are necessary to stop rainwater penetration to the interior of buildings. It is important to check these at least once a year. A slipped flashing can cause unsightly damp patches to form on ceilings and walls and can lead to wet and dry rot. Ensure that slipped flashings are re-fixed using proper wedges and pointing.
- **maintenance of eaves gutters and downpipes** - cast iron rainwater goods need regular de-rusting and painting. Split or broken sections should be replaced with matching lengths in the same material - not plastic. Ensure that downpipes are not blocked and are free flowing.
- **minor repairs to brickwork and stonework** - if the external face of bricks or stone blocks spall and erode it may be necessary to cut out the damaged units and replace them with matching bricks or blocks in terms of size, colour and texture. Re-pointing should be in keeping with the original mortar mix and texture. Generally speaking mortars on traditional buildings are lime-based and this should be replicated without the use of hard portland cement which encourages softer materials, like some types of brick and stone, to erode more quickly. Mortar pointing should be finished to match the surrounding joints.
- **maintenance of external render** - old lime renders and daubs are often self coloured which adds to the character of the building. These should be retained and patch repaired carefully to avoid unsightly changes in appearance. Cement render should be avoided unless the original render was 19th or 20th Century and of this type.
- **preventative treatment of timber against insect and fungal attack** - the best form of prevention is ensuring that timber is kept dry and well ventilated. Where timber treatment is proposed using chemical sprays these should be colourless and, if bats are present, they need to be non-toxic. Bats are a protected species and the presence of bats means that English Nature must be notified of any works which may have an effect on the colony.
- **minor glazing repairs** - if the glass in a listed building is of historic importance its conservation should only be entrusted to a specialist conservator. Crown and cylinder glass can be very thin and brittle but its imperfections can add a great deal to the character of windows and doors.

For further information and advice, please contact:

Development Services
Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk
King's Court
Chapel Street
King's Lynn
Norfolk
PE30 1EX

Tel: 01553 616200

Fax: 01553 616652

Website: www.west-norfolk.gov.uk