

Windows in historic and listed buildings

A general introduction for homeowners

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When looking at a building there are few features which are as important to the character and appearance as windows. Attractive, well-maintained, historic windows contribute not only to the beauty of a building, but also to its historic and architectural interest and its monetary value. Historic timber is often of a far better quality than any timber easily available today and the craftsmanship of traditional windows can be superb.

The unnecessary replacement of historic windows can damage the character and appearance of an historic building, reduce the visual appeal and value of the property and cost the owners considerably more than a good quality repair.

We are often asked for general advice about whether replacement windows are appropriate in historic buildings. This leaflet will guide you through the steps that we take when assessing whether replacement windows are appropriate, and if so whether you will need any consents or permissions to do so.



Historic building with original windows

General Principles

There are many ways to make a window wind and weather tight. These form a sliding scale of intervention. We would always recommend that works are undertaken at the lowest appropriate level on the scale.

1. Easy fixes - fitting heavy curtains in the winter, or using shutters where these are present, can significantly reduce your energy bills.
2. Small scale repair - works that do not require the removal of the window from its frame such as removing old paint, re-puttying, repainting or fixing window catches.
3. Full repair - works that require the window to be removed from its frame such as splicing in new timber to repair rot, straightening or replacing warped elements, fixing sash weights and runners.
4. Improvement - fitting brushes along sash runners or installing secondary glazing may be appropriate in some cases to improve energy efficiency. There are also specialist companies who are able to double glaze some forms of existing traditional windows using the original glass and frames.
5. Replacement - in all cases where windows are of historic and/or architectural value, replacement should be the last resort where the window is agreed to be beyond reasonable repair. These replacements should be on a like for like basis, and undertaken by an experienced joiner or metalworker.
6. Reinstatement - where the existing window is not of any historic or architectural interest and the new unit will improve the visual character of the building, it may be appropriate to replace them with new bespoke units.

Reasons why we prefer repairs:

- Repairs of traditional windows are **almost always cheaper** than replacements. There are a number of qualified joiners in this area, experienced in repairing historic windows, who can provide you with quotes for repairs.
- Historic windows are a **key element of the history of a house**, they can tell us about the way people built their houses in the past, the kinds of tools they used, how affluent or otherwise a particular area was and how fashions changed over time. They are a part of our national heritage.
- Traditional and historic windows look better than modern off-the-peg windows. Whilst it is possible to get windows copied by experienced joiners or metal workers which will match the original, if you are buying from a company that uses off the peg designs then it will be highly unlikely to get a window that will actually match the original. The best that you will get is a likeness to fit the window aperture. This is especially true of uPVC designs which are manufactured in bulk in standard moulds of various sizes, so will not be appropriate for historic buildings.
- Traditional windows can be made wind and weather tight very easily, and a few small repairs can improve the efficiency of your home almost as much as new windows can at a fraction of the cost of new ones.
- It is far more eco-friendly to repair an existing window than to replace it with a new unit. Think about the carbon footprint of the industrial processes needed to make uPVC frames, or new glass. You can avoid all that by repairing what you already have.
- Historic windows are likely to be much more durable. Many modern replacement windows are only guaranteed to last 10 or 15 years. There are traditional timber windows in the District which we know are over 250 years old and are still going strong!
- Often people want replacement windows because they think that new windows don't need annual maintenance. This is not true. "Low maintenance" does not mean "no maintenance". All windows (even uPVC ones) should be thoroughly cleaned and checked every year. Traditional windows are easy to repair if you break a pane, or damage the frames, and you can learn to do this yourself. If a uPVC frame fails, the chances are the whole unit will need replacing.

Do I need permission to repair my windows?

No, you do not need any formal consent or permission to repair existing windows using any of the methods in points 1 to 4, general principles on the front page. However if you live in a listed building please seek [further advice](#) from a Historic Buildings Officer before you carry out the works.

Please note that changing the glazing (e.g. from single to double glazing), materials (e.g. from timber to uPVC) or design (e.g. from 8 over 8 sashes to plate glass) **do not count as repairs**. All works of replacement will require Listed Buildings Consent and planning permission on non-residential properties and flats. Consent will not be given for inappropriate alterations.

I want to repair my windows – how can I do this?

Metal Windows:

Timber framed windows with wrought iron opening lights or leaded lights are usually the oldest and most precious form of window.

Failed hinges, rust damage, distortion or simple build up of paint can cause problems in metal windows. Rust and excessive paint can be removed using special chemicals, and there are a number of specialist companies who can do this for you.

Distortion or warping can be repaired by a local metalsmith. Wrought iron and steel windows may be welded, but cast iron is better repaired using “cold stitching” - a process which does not heat the metal.

Distorted green/brown glass can be very old and should be retained and re-used. Sheet glass with applied lead is not normally acceptable.



Leaded window

Timber Casement Windows:

One of the most common problems with timber windows is paint build up over decades. This makes the windows stick and prevents them from closing properly. To strip off the paint layers and repaint (with two coats of undercoat and one of top coat) is a relatively easy job that you can do yourself. Please be aware that pre 1960's paint may contain lead so appropriate precautions should be taken.

Other small repairs, such as the replacement of a cracked or broken pane or the reputting of the glass, can also be carried out without the need for specialist contractors if you are careful.

Distortion is a common problem in older windows. In some cases it is the window frame that has distorted over time, in others it is the casement itself. Both can be easily fixed by an experienced joiner.

Rot is often cited as a reason to replace historic windows. In many cases it is only a small portion of the window, (for example the base rail of the casement where it gets wettest), requires replacement. These can be spliced in without too much difficulty by an experienced joiner and finished to match the rest of the window.



Timber casement window

Timber Sash Windows:

The most common problem associated with sash windows is that they do not open and close properly. In most cases this is caused by a combination of small problems.

Overpainting causes windows to stick and twist as you move them, making them hard to open and close.

The most common mistake that most people make is to paint the sash runners. By removing paint from the runners and sanding them down so that they are smooth you can instantly improve the movement of the window. Please be aware that pre 1960's paint may contain lead so appropriate precautions should be taken.

In some cases the weight of decades of paint on the windows can add considerably to the overall weight of the windows. Sashes operate through a system of weighted ropes contained within the sash boxes, and adding extra weight to the sash itself will make it harder to open as the sash weights will no longer balance the weight of the window. Remove the layers of paint and repaint with two undercoats and a single top coat. This should make the window much easier to lift.

Broken or damaged sash cords can cause problems as the windows will not run properly if the sash weights are not working to balance the weight of the windows. Make sure all sash cords are present and run smoothly. Replacing sash cords is an easy job, but requires the removal of the sashes from the frame. You can do this yourself if you feel confident, but there are also a number of local joiners who are able to do this work for you. Please be aware that sash cords may contain asbestos.

Distortion is a common problem in older windows. In most cases it is the window frame rather than the sash which has distorted over time. Distortion can be easily fixed by an experienced joiner.

Rot is often cited as a reason to replace historic windows. In many cases it is only a small portion of the window, (for example the base rail of the sash where it gets wettest) requires replacement. These can be spliced in without too much difficulty by an experienced joiner and finished to match the rest of the window.

For further information on all types of traditional windows consult [Historic England, Traditional Windows, Their Care, Repair and Upgrading.](#)



Timber sash window before and after repairs

Finding an experienced craftsman

Sometimes, finding the right joiner or metalsmith to complete a window repair can be a daunting task. However, there are a number of national and local firms that have a great deal of experience of repairing historic windows in both listed and unlisted buildings.

There are a small number of national firms who can repair historic windows and improve energy efficiency whilst retaining as much of the original fabric as possible. Some of these technologies have a proven track record, others are new to the market.

Trade directories such as the [Building Conservation Directory](#) maintain lists of national companies. AVDC also maintain a list of local firms who are willing to undertake window repairs. The Council is not permitted to recommend any one craftsman over another, and it is up to you as the homeowner to

check references and make sure that you are happy with the contractor before engaging them. If you would like this information please [email](#) to request the list.

Make sure that your contractor has a history of dealing with historic buildings. Ask them whether they have fitted windows in listed buildings before, and always make sure that they are able to prepare a full specification for the repair works along with an itemised quotation.

**1st floor Sash Window LHS small Window 1020w X1300h
complete overhaul to include**

- *Scaffold to front of building to access windows*

Quotation £520 + VAT

- *Strip back paint to timber*
- *Renew 3 no glazing 155x270 in 3mm glass*
- *Rake out decayed timber and prime good timber exposed*
- *Resin fill with timber care conservation resin solution, sand upon setting*
- *Repair putty to all panes inside and out with liquid putty mix*
- *Renew 4 no sash cords*
- *Refix catch, add draught brush side trims vertically, internally*
- *Prime, undercoat and glass window inside/out with 2 coats of weathershield system*
- *Clean glass on completion*

Quotation £750 + VAT

Total Cost £1,270.00 + VAT

Example of specification and costs for window repair

I have read all the information above, but I still want to replace my windows, what should I do?

First, it is important to know which permission(s) you will need:

- If your building is listed, you will need a Listed Building Consent to replace or reinstate windows. You may require consent for improvement works as well, please contact the Historic Buildings Officer if you are intending to undertake works such as those outlined in point 4, under general principles on the front page.
- If you live in a building that **IS NOT** a single residential dwelling (e.g. a flat, maisonette, business or shop) you will need Planning Permission to replace or reinstate your windows if you are changing the appearance of the building (e.g. with a new design of window, or using different materials). You will not need Planning Permission to improve your windows.
- In all cases you will require **Building Regulations Approval** for the replacement of any window. This can either be from a FENSA registered installer or from the AVDC Building Control Team.

The building regulations are slightly different for listed buildings than they are for other buildings regarding the type of replacement windows that will be acceptable.

If you would like more information please [email](#).

What are the chances of permission/consent being granted?

Listed Building Consent:

When considering applications for Listed Building Consent we have to take into account the impact that the proposal will have on the character, appearance and fabric of the building. If the proposal is likely to have a negative impact on any of these, then it will be refused.

In general terms, a proposal for replacement windows in a listed building will only be considered acceptable if:

1. The existing windows are poor quality modern insertions, and their replacement would improve the character and appearance of the building, and the replacement would not damage the fabric of the listed building OR
2. The existing windows are of historic or architectural interest but are so badly damaged that they are irreparable, the replacements are an exact replica of the existing windows and the replacements would not cause harm to the fabric of the listed building

Planning Permission:

When considering applications for planning permission for windows in a Conservation Area, we have to take into account the impact that the proposal will have on the character and appearance of the area as a whole. If the proposal is likely to have a negative impact on these then it will be refused.

In general terms, a proposal for replacement windows in a conservation area will only be considered acceptable if:

1. The proposed new windows match the detailing, style and appearance of the existing, and their replacement would preserve the character and appearance of the building and the area as a whole OR
2. The proposed new windows are more in keeping with the age and design of the building and (in the case of groups of similar buildings) the surrounding buildings, and their replacement would enhance the character and appearance of the building and the area as a whole

Building Regulations Approval:

All replacement windows require Building Control approval.

If they are being replaced with windows which meet all the current thermal and other Building Regulation requirements and they are being installed by an installer who is a member of one of the competent person installation schemes (eg. FENSA), the installer can notify the competent person scheme who will issue a certificate of Building Regulation compliance to the homeowner. They will also notify the local authority that the works comply with the Building Regulations.

If however, the replacement windows do not meet some of current building regulations, which will always be the case where single glazing is used or thinner double glazing than current standards then a Building Regulations application will be required.

All new or enlarged windows will always require a Building Regulations application and cannot be certified through a competent persons scheme.

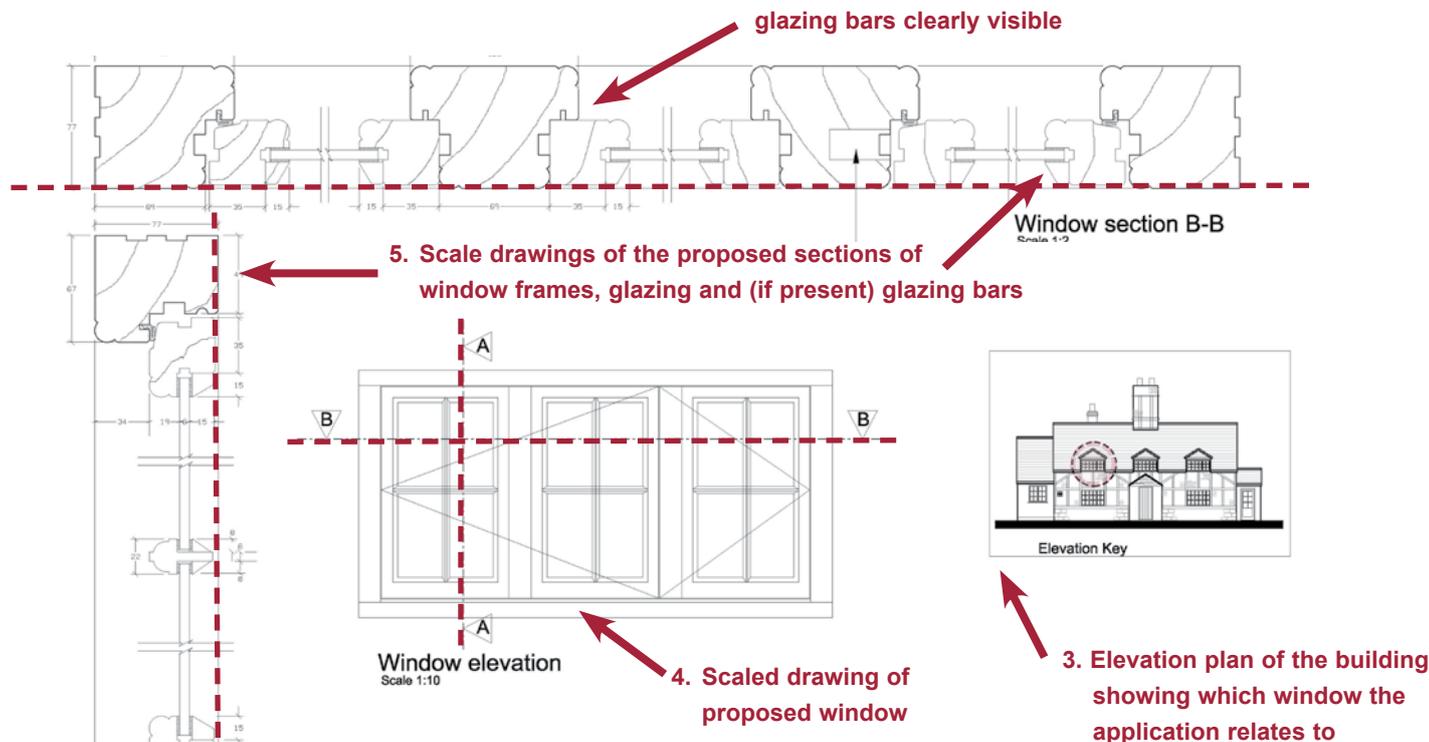
For more information please [email](#).

What Information should I submit with my Application?

Your application should include:

- A completed application form for [Listed Building Consent](#) or [Planning Permission](#).
- A brief 'Design and Access Statement' outlining
 - How old your building is
 - The type and age of the windows
 - A list of the windows that the application relates to
 - The reasons for replacement
 - Advice you have previously had relating to the possibility of repairing the windows, and who the advice was from
 - Reasons why you consider the replacement windows will either preserve or enhance the appearance of the building
 - An outline of any alterations that will be required to the fabric of the building in order to fit the new windows (e.g. whether the existing windows openings need to be extended)
- A photo of the whole window as existing, inside and outside, and close up photos of existing frame, glazing bars and any areas that are rotten or damaged
- Full drawn details of the proposed replacement window including:
 1. Name and address of building, contact details for client and/or agent or joiner
 2. Scale bar or dimensions written on drawing and written scale
 3. Elevation plan of the building indicating which window the application relates to
 4. Scale drawings of the whole window
 5. Scale drawings of the proposed sections of window frames, glazing and (if present) glazing bars
 6. Details of the proposed timber to be used, along with details of paint or timber finish, proposed ironmongery, bolts and glass.

An annotated example of drawn details is given on the next page.



Specification

1. FSC Softwood (Douglas Fir or similar) to comply with BS EN 942:1996
2. All softwood to be preservative treated by double vacuum impregnation in accordance with preservatives manufacturer's instructions
3. FSC Hardwood sill where required
4. Weather strips to complete casement surround to EN:12365-1
5. Windows to receive 1 no. primer, 1 no. undercoat and 2 no. finish top coats
6. Ironmongery to be traditional (black iron) casement stay and fastener
7. Large single casement to have 1 no. pair of lever action flush bolts for emergency egress window (min unobstructed area of 0.33 sqm and at least 450 x 450mm clear opening) in accordance with Approved Document B1
8. Glass to single glazed, 6.8mm Pilkington Optilam or similar

6. Details of the proposed timber to be used, along with details of paint or timber finish, proposed ironmongery, bolts and glass

1. The name and address of the building contact details for the clients and/or the agent or joiner have been removed from this application

This example of full drawn details for a replacement window is annotated to show the information required

For an audio or large print version of this leaflet, please phone 01296 585454

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