

## Repairs / replacement of windows in historic buildings

Windows are an important feature of many historic buildings. Changing their proportions or design can greatly affect the character, appearance or architectural impact. Windows can also give a strong indication of a buildings history and former standing within the community.

Where original examples exist, they should be repaired rather than replaced if at all possible, and the original fixtures and fittings (eg, hinges, catches, pulleys, handles, stays, etc) refurbished and re-used. The most frequent criticisms of old windows are:

- ❑ The timber is rotten;
- ❑ They are draughty, rattle or jam;
- ❑ They need frequent repainting.

In fact, it is often quite practical and economical to splice in new timber or repair any damage, to fix new sash cords, remove existing (and often excessive) paint and repaint, etc. It is still cheaper to maintain and repaint windows on a regular basis (for instance, every five years or so), than to replace traditional wood windows with upvc or metal windows.

Also, the performance of existing windows can be improved in a number of alternative ways that have less impact on the historical nature of the building. These include the use of draught stripping, secondary glazing (with glazing bars aligned with the existing), and the refurbishment of original shutters.

The structure of the windows is usually composite, made up from sections of timber, glass and metal. The different elements can therefore be repaired or replaced as necessary.

When carrying out repairs it is important to save and re-use any old glass. This can often be carefully removed from the frames by a skilled joiner. The methods of producing the old glass are generally not used nowadays, and so maintaining the original characteristics of the glass is very important.

### Casement Windows

This design of window dates back to mediaeval times and was made of metal or wood. In North Devon, most were built between the earlier mediaeval period of narrow stone and wood mullions, and the later period of tall sash windows.

Many windows of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century were square, but the number of windowpanes varies. For instance three panes to each light or six panes to each light. Their modest size was dictated by the small pieces of crown glass or 'quarries' that were available at the time. They were usually hung on hinges and opened sideways.

Normally, traditional cottage type casement windows were set back in thick walls built of cob or stone.

In brick cottages – relatively rare in North Devon – the window is set beneath a shallow arch.

In stone cottages that have not been whitewashed or rendered, wooden lintels are sometimes exposed.

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, improvements in glass making meant that larger and thinner panes could be produced. This led to the sash window becoming the norm for the better-quality houses of the time, whilst casement windows continued to be used in farmhouses, cottages and barns.

Wrought iron windows are becoming increasingly rare as they are replaced with modern equivalents. Similarly, timber casement windows from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries are reducing in numbers as upvc or stained hardwood versions are being introduced.

Should replacement of existing casement windows be unavoidable, it is important to try and install windows that are as near to the original design as possible. Consideration should also be made of the positioning of the window frame. Early casement windows were usually painted and were set flush within their frames with slim, moulded glazing bars. By contrast, modern casement windows are often positioned outside the frame, with protruding sills and no mouldings. The double-glazing can also give a mirror-like reflection to the exterior.

### Sash Windows

Sash windows are to be found in both urban and rural areas of North Devon. In the rural areas they are mainly in larger properties, but can also be found in some substantial stone cottages.

Sash windows were introduced into Britain from the Netherlands in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century. In North Devon, many of the windows are from the later period of the 1850's onwards. These have much larger panes of glass and horns on either side of the transom member of the upper sash to strengthen the junction of the meeting rail with the frame. There are also examples of round headed sash windows and bays with curved sashes at each end to be found in Barnstaple and the surrounding area.

Like casement windows, this Authority is keen for sash windows to be refurbished or replaced on a like-for-like basis whenever possible. Competent joiners can be undertaken many

repairs with the windows in situ. This might be to replace rotten timbers, fit new weights, pulleys and cords, repaint or wax the sashes, or to upgrade the draught proofing / sound proofing, etc.

Secondary glazing can also be considered as long as this does not interfere with the original features, etc.

### Window surrounds

Whilst consideration of the window and frame is paramount, it is equally important to take the same level of care with the window surrounds.

Again, in many cases the surrounds can be repaired rather or reinstated using the original as a pattern. Sills, which are particularly vulnerable to rot, should be replaced with oak or other suitable hard wood.

### Do I need permission to repair or replace windows?

For any historic building which is not classified as being Listed, the Council would encourage owners to repair or refurbish the windows, preferably matching existing materials and reinstating the original detail. Advice on appropriate materials, repair techniques, and detail of suitably skilled / qualified contractors is available from the Councils Heritage and Conservation Officer (see 'Contacts').

For properties which are Listed Buildings or are located within designated Conservation Areas, it is usually necessary to apply to the Councils Planning Unit for the appropriate Consent.

If you are proposing to undertake like-for-like repairs it may not be necessary to obtain Consent, but we would actively advice you to

confirm this with the Planning Unit or Heritage and Conservation Officer prior to starting work.

For more substantial works, and particularly if the property is in a Conservation Area, Consent will almost certainly be required. The appropriate Application Forms are available from the Planning Unit office or on the Councils web site. The Form(s) should be submitted to the Planning Unit along with detailed drawings showing the proposals prior to any works starting.

### Contacts

For further advice about historic windows, please contact:

**Planning Unit**, North Devon District Council, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Civic Centre, North Walk, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 1EA.  
Tel: 01271 388288  
Fax: 01271 388293  
E-mail: [planning@northdevon.gov.uk](mailto:planning@northdevon.gov.uk)  
Web site: [www.northdevon.gov.uk/planning](http://www.northdevon.gov.uk/planning)

**Heritage and Conservation**, North Devon District Council, Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon, The Square, Barnstaple, Devon EX32 8LN.  
Tel: 01271 346747

**English Heritage**, South West Region, 29 Queen Square, Bristol, BS1 4ND.  
Tel: 0117 975 0700  
Web site: [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

**Office of the Deputy Prime Minister** -  
Web site: [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

**Planning Applications.co.uk** -  
Web site: [www.planning-applications.co.uk](http://www.planning-applications.co.uk)

# Planning Unit

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Photo by John Peacham

