

MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

Prevention is better than cure

The secret of effective home maintenance is to plan ahead. Give your home a thorough inspection once a year. Don't worry about whether the wallpaper is this year's colour or the kitchen units look a bit old fashioned. Instead check the condition of the external woodwork and walls and look in the loft. Small telltale signs detected now and rectified can save you a fortune in the long-term.

Things to look for

1. External woodwork – check doors, windows and fascia boards for early signs of rot, is the wood soft and spongy? Look particularly at joints and edges, as these are often the places where water penetration begins. Small hairline cracks in paint can point to future problems. Ideally you should paint or treat external woodwork at least every 3 - 5 years. If done properly this can extend the life of these elements almost indefinitely. Small areas of soft or rotten wood can be cut out, the remaining wood treated with preservative and/or hardener, the gap filled and the repair painted or stained. This is easily done by even the most inexperienced DIY'er with a range of products sold at any DIY store. Sticking doors and windows are often a seasonal problem due to changes in moisture content of the wood. If you shave off edges to prevent sticking make sure that you paint or treat the exposed wood to avoid future problems of rotting.
2. Electrics/Gas – Electrical circuits are hidden and easily forgotten, but they have a useful life of only about 25-30 years. After that they deteriorate and can lead to risk of electrocution or fire. Electrical rewiring is beyond the scope of DIY'ers and you should always use a qualified electrician such as an NICEIC approved contractor. If you

have moved recently into an older house you may not know when the house was last re-wired. Cloth or rubber – covered wires (as opposed to PVC) are a sure sign of old wiring, as are Bakelite fittings. If in doubt get the electrics checked by a qualified electrician and follow their advice. Gas appliances should be checked and serviced by a Corgi registered installer annually. Keep copies of any gas/electric reports as these could add to the value of your property.

3. Roof – the first signs of weathering usually appear at the roof ridge and can often be seen from ground level (a pair of binoculars will help in external roof inspection). Missing or crumbling mortar between ridge or hip tiles is an early sign of future problems. Loose mortar or cracked rendering to chimney stacks should also be looked for. Look for slipped, cracked or broken slates/or extensive use of slate hooks and check in the loft space for signs of water damage. Roof felt is a second line of defence, but should not be relied on to prevent rain penetration. If a tile has slipped others may also do so soon. Heavy wind may dislodge the odd tile or slate and replacing that one alone may be all that is needed. If tiles are slipping generally, however, or if slippage has occurred without a storm then the problem may be more serious such as nail corrosion, batten rot or flaking off of the nibs (small protrusions on the back of the tiles that hook over the battens). Lamination (flaking) of slates is an early indication that the slate is breaking down as is spalling of clay tiles (usually shown by lighter coloured spots on the tile). Final failure may take many years, but you should check lofts more regularly if you notice these problems.

Older houses may have cement fillets rather than lead or zinc flashings between chimney stacks and roofs or between annexes and the main house. These are less satisfactory than lead/zinc and will eventually crack and allow water penetration.

4. Loft ventilation – inadequate loft ventilation can lead to condensation which if left unchecked, can cause rot in roof timbers. Replacement of roof timbers is expensive and improving ventilation will help stop problems arising. Often ventilation at eaves level has been reduced by loft insulation being pushed too far into the edges of the roof. Just pull it back a few inches until you can see daylight under the eaves. If you have done this and condensation still occurs you may need to consider providing additional vents to the roof slope or ridge. Eaves ventilation grills can be provided to prevent birds entering the roof space.
5. Flat roofs – Flat roofs are a frequent source of problems. In general a flat roof has a useful life of only about 15 years (compared to 50 years

for a conventional roof). Try to avoid walking on a flat roof as this can damage the covering and allow water through. There is little you can do to extend the life of a flat roof once water has penetrated as it gets into the composite board underneath and rapidly softens it. The life can be extended prior to problems arising, however, by the application of a coat of mastic if the surface shows signs of cracking (again take great care not to damage the surface when applying the mastic). Use walking boards with a piece of carpet underneath. Suitable reflective granite chippings/reflective paint should be maintained over the whole roof surface, to reduce the damaging effects of sunlight on the roof covering.

6. Guttering/Rainwater Pipes – while it is raining check for gutters overflowing, leaking joints or missing stop-ends. An overflowing gutter may simply be blocked with leaves or moss – clean gutters in late autumn. In the dry look for moss/algae on walls where it could indicate the guttering is overflowing/leaking. In particular check areas where concrete paths or patios allow water to splash back up the walls, this could lead to dampness inside your property. Ensure that gullies (small grids at the base of the rainwater down pipe) are cleaned out once a year. If there is not a gully it is possible you have a soakaway which should be at least 3m (10ft) away from your walls. Soakaways are often closer than this, however, in older properties which can lead to settlement or structural cracking if they are not working properly – surface ponding or permanently damp areas may need checking.
7. Chimney Stacks – check for loose or leaning chimney pots, bulging of the brickwork, cracked render, loose pointing, loose bricks (especially in the top courses) or structural cracking. Where chimneys are tall check that they are vertical – a leaning chimney is potentially dangerous.
8. External Walls – check for cracked or bulging rendering – suspect areas can be tapped with a key – a hollow sound indicates that the rendering is loose. Defective rendering will allow water penetration which can lead to damp problems and in cold weather can freeze causing rendering to fall off. For brick or stone walls check for missing or loose pointing or flaking brick or stone surfaces. Check for structural cracking especially around door and window openings; long horizontal cracks at 1½ - 2ft intervals can indicate wall tie problems. Check also that walls are vertical and not bulging, especially near the eaves which could indicate ‘roof spread’ (that is, the roof is not adequately braced and is spreading at the base and pushing the top courses of brick or stone outwards). Cracks in walls are not always serious, they could be long-standing from early slight settlement that has now stopped. If cracks are filled and then re-open, however, then

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this could indicate a continuing problem and needs to be investigated by a structural engineer.

9. Internal Walls and Ceilings – cracking of plaster at ceiling/wall joints is common and is not necessarily a cause for concern. Loose plaster can be removed and the crack filled. If plaster cracks continue to open up after filling, however, then this will require further investigation. Bulging of ceiling plaster or other evidence that large areas have become unkeyed is an indication that the ceiling requires replacement.
10. Dampness – See the enclosed leaflet 'Keep your home free from damp and mould'.

LIFE SPAN OF BUILDING ELEMENTS

The following table shows typical life spans of major building components. The figures are approximations only as the actual life spans are dependent on the type of construction, degree of exposure and degree of maintenance.

Two items of concern should be the electrical system and gas boilers. These are often ignored as long as they work but both can present serious risks to occupants, as they get older. Gas boilers in particular need regular servicing.

You will note that kitchens and bathrooms generally only need replacing on repair grounds every 30-40 years, in practice they are replaced much more frequently simply on the grounds of fashion.

	Houses and Bungalows	All Flats in blocks of below 6 storeys
Wall structure	80	80
Lintels	60	60
Spalling brickwork	30	30
Wall finish	60	60
Roof structure (tile/slate)	50	30
“ “ (flat)	15	
Roof finish	50	30
Chimney	50	50
Windows	40	30) assuming regular decoration -) can be much less for soft-wood
External Doors	40	30) windows and doors
Kitchen	30	30
Bathrooms	40	40
Heating – central heating gas-boiler	15	15 – assuming annual servicing
Heating – other	30	30

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Electrical systems

30

30

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