MORECAMBE TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE (THI) 2 – A VIEW FOR ERIC

A GUIDE TO BUILDING MAINTENANCE

TOWARDS MORECAMBE'S BRAND NEW, BRIGHT TOMORROW

Stave off decay

It was William Morris, in his Manifesto for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), in 1877 who encouraged owners of buildings, **"of all times and styles…to stave off decay by daily care, to prop a perilous wall or mend a leaky roof…"**

This is excellent advice, but all too often is not followed.

Planned or preventative maintenance is the best way of looking after an historic building since it can reduce or remove the need for repair. However, unplanned or reactive maintenance, or sometimes total neglect, is sadly all too common.

Lancaster City Council is now making grants available for targeted properties in the western end of the Morecambe Conservation Area through the second Morecambe Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) 2: A View for Eric. Grants can assist with repairing historic buildings in this area but are not available to carry out routine repair and maintenance which should be carried out by property owners as standard practice. More information about THI2 can be found at www.lancaster.gov.uk/viewforeric.

Why should we maintain our historic buildings?

- A well-cared-for building will help retain maximum value and extend its life;
- maintenance reduces the need to carry out major and expensive repairs or restoration, as well as avoiding the disruption these can cause;
- maintenance ensures the retention of historic fabric, since small-scale repairs result in fewer losses than large-scale replacements; and
- the retention of existing materials and the use of fewer new materials is environmentally sustainable.

There is also a wider reason to carry out such works.

The appearance of property can really affect people's perception of an area. Buildings in poor repair and maintenance can make people feel negative about that area. This is especially true for visitors. It may impact upon how much time people will spend in a place and also how often and whether at all they will make a repeat visit.

An environment that is a bit run down and not so attractive in turn discourages investment. A spiral of decline can set in that can end up with places feeling unsafe and threatening. Conversely, places that are cared for and look good encourage people to spend more time in the place. This can make places feel safer, drive up custom and in turn can encourage investment.

The City Council is working to make both the centres of Morecambe and Lancaster better places to be in and is therefore keen to work with property owners and occupiers to address properties deemed to adversely affect the area. These areas are therefore being proactively targeted and where necessary the Council is using its powers under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990) to ensure works are carried out the improve the appearance of properties and the wider area.

To find out more about this initiative visit www.lancaster.gov.uk/s215.

Preventative maintenance

Whilst pro-active measures such as the THI2 grant scheme and the Section 215 initiative described above are important, it cannot be emphasised enough how beneficial systematic maintenance is to the well-being of buildings. It is important to identify those elements of a building which have the potential to deteriorate and decay, and plan accordingly. Maintenance should be cyclical, and different areas of a building can be inspected at different intervals. Set out below are examples of typical maintenance inspection cycles:

Bi-annual inspection (every 6 months):

- Rainwater goods (these should be cleaned out once at the beginning of November, following autumn, and once at the beginning of April to remove any winter debris)
- Chimneys (from the ground)
- External paintwork
- Vents and airbricks (check they are free of blockages)

Annual inspection:

- Roof coverings
- Gutters (parapet, valley, box)
- Flashings/flaunchings
- Rooflights/cupolas
- Parapets
- Chimneys (close inspection)
- Projecting stone features
- Internal roof structure
- Stonework (including pointing)
- Render
- Windows, doors and other external joinery

The ideal time for identifying roof defects or blocked gutters is during a heavy downpour.

In addition, it is important to inspect a building, particularly roofs and flashings, including attics and roof voids, following a storm event.

Regular inspection is key to ensuring a building is well looked after. This also enables a building owner to build up a full picture of the condition of a property.

Carrying out an inspection

Many owners of small properties will inspect their own property. It is important to identify those items which you can check yourself, and those for which you will need to seek professional assistance in order to access or to assess the condition of.

Much of the maintenance inspection can be done from ground level, though binoculars are required for the upper storeys. If you are unable to gain easy access to the roof for an inspection then it is recommended that you employ a suitably experienced tradesperson or surveyor to assess its condition.

Working at heights

All working at height must be risk-assessed. The Work at Height Regulations 2005 (as amended) apply to all work at height where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury.

The Regulations place duties on employers, the self-employed and any person who controls the work of others (e.g. facilities managers or building owners who may contract others to work at height) to the extent that they control the work.

For further details see:
The Work at Height Regulations 2005 (as amended): A Brief Guide (Health and Safety Executive, 2007) - http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg401.pdf

Safe use of ladders and stepladders: an employers' guide (HSE, 2005) - http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg402.pdf

It is important to approach an inspection systematically. A maintenance checklist is therefore crucial.

It is best to start from the roof and work your way down the outside of the building, looking at each elevation in turn (upper floor windows may be possible to check from inside). An internal inspection of the roof should then follow.

All records should be kept together, to enable you to go back and check items noted from a previous inspection and to see what, if any, remedial action was taken.

Part of a maintenance programme involves organising the required maintenance and repairs for a building, in order of priority, over a planned timescale.
Inspecting:

Roofs

The roof is one of the most important elements in preventing a building from falling into decay. They provide protection from the weather and if they are poorly maintained, the fabric below will suffer.

Signs to look for: 

Roof covering

- Missing, slipped or cracked slates (these can be replaced like-for-like)
- Damaged or missing flashing
- Moss (harbours damp and can cause slates to deteriorate)
- Ivy or other climbing plants (can crack slates or tiles)
- Delamination
- Discolouration (caused by leaching)

Internal roof structure

- Rotten or worm-infested timbers (particularly where the timbers are bedded in masonry)
- Open joints
- Sagging
- Broken or distorted timbers

Bats

Under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* and *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010*, bats are protected. It is an offence to kill, injure, capture or disturb bats or to damage, destroy or obstruct access to their roosts.

For further information, see:
The Bat Conservation Trust: http://www.bats.org.uk/;

Natural England: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk;

or the publication, *Bats in Traditional Buildings* (English Heritage, National Trust, Natural England, 2009):
http://www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/bats_accessible_20090429095157.pdf

Chimneys

Chimneys are particularly vulnerable, being so exposed to the elements. They form an important part of the character of a building, adding interest to the roofline, and even when redundant we would strongly encourage their retention. However, their neglect can have catastrophic consequences.

Signs to look for: 

- Leaning

- Cracked pots
- Missing pointing
- Cracks
- Leaks

Rainwater goods
Blocked gutters and hoppers can have extremely damaging consequences for the fabric. They should be cleaned out at the end of autumn and the beginning of spring.

Signs to look for: 

- Cracks
- Vegetation
- Silt
- Leaf blockages
- Nests
- Loose fixings (whether rise and fall brackets, or stone corbels)
- Missing sections

Flashings
These are the most vulnerable parts of a roof, particularly at roof junctions, and where water is most likely to find its way into the building. Rooflight and cupola flashings should also be carefully checked.

- Splits
- Wind damage
- Buckling

External walls
This can be a large area to look at. A systematic inspection should be carried out, looking at each elevation in turn.

Stonework
The various types of stonework deterioration can assist in diagnosing a problem:

- Spalling (frost action resulting from hard cement mortar/cracks/voids)
- Crumbling arrises (hard cement)
- Cracks (hard cement and possible building movement/settlement)
- Dampness (blocked/cracked rainwater goods)
- Vegetation (dampness/voids)
- Efflorescence (impurities, usually in the mortar)
- Rust/iron staining (rusting iron can expand and shatter stonework around it)

Mortar
Is it really necessary to re-point? The correct mortar mix, colour and texture are extremely important, as is the pointing technique. The mortar can have a huge impact

on the appearance of a building. Lancaster City Council has produced a guidance note on good pointing practice, which is available on the Council's website. It is important to remember that the re-pointing of a listed building requires listed building consent.

Signs to look for: 

- Type (should not be harder than the masonry itself)
- Missing pointing (open joints)
- Cracks
- Erosion

Render

Render can fulfil a number of functions, including that of providing a decorative surface, such as 'stucco', a smooth render finish incised with lines to imitate stone work. Render was also used commonly in this part of the country, such as roughcast, as weather protection against driving rain, particularly in exposed areas.

Signs to look for: 

- Cracks
- Bulging
- Dampness
- Mould/vegetation

Windows, doors and other external joinery

Windows, doors and other external joinery, such as barge/verge boards are very exposed to the weather and if not maintained, can deteriorate rapidly. Any cracks or open joints will let in water and will result in rot, leading to the cutting out of the rotten timber and jointing in of new elements or, in the worst case, wholesale replacement.

Signs to look for: 

- Cracks
- Rot
- Swelling
- Flaking paint

Further information

A Stitch in Time, IHBC & SPAB, 2005

Maintaining your home: a short guide for homeowners, Historic Scotland, 2007

Hunt, R & Suhr, M, *Old House Handbook: A Practical Guide to Care and Repair,* SPAB 2008

Websites:

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB): www.spab.org.uk

Maintain our Heritage: www.maintainourheritage.co.uk

Historic Scotland: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Historic England: www.historicengland.org.uk

Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC): www.ihbc.org.uk

Contacts

For further information or advice on the maintenance and repair of historic buildings, please contact the Council's Conservation Team:

Conservation Team
Regeneration & Planning Services
Lancaster City Council
PO Box 4
Town Hall
Lancaster
LA1 1QR

Phone: 01524 582360
E-mail: conservationteam@lancaster.gov.uk
Web: www.lancaster.gov.uk/conservation