

Replacing Windows

December 2012

1) Introduction

The purpose of this advice note is to explain when consent is required for replacing and repairing windows. It also explains why repair is preferable to replacement, the styles of traditional windows in North Somerset and why some modern replacement windows are unlikely to be acceptable in historic buildings and Conservation Areas.

This advice note does not relate to inserting new windows in new buildings. Advice about overlooking and privacy issues from new windows can be found within our “Residential Design Guide – section 1 Protecting living conditions of neighbours” which is available on our website.

2) Getting advice

The Planning Portal website at www.planningportal.gov.uk contains free and helpful advice about the need for permission when replacing or altering windows.

We can also provide you with our informal written opinion about whether you need permission to insert new windows or, if you know that you need permission, the likelihood of permission being granted. There is normally a charge for both these services which is explained within our public advice notes “*How we can help you find out if you need planning permission*” and “*Will permission be granted?*” Both these advice notes can be found on our website at www.n-somerset.gov.uk.

You can also view on the internet directories of professional companies that can help you to repair and replace traditional windows appropriately. Simply enter “*directory building conservation*” into your web search facility.

3) The need for permission

You do not normally require planning permission to replace or alter a window. The circumstances when you will require planning permission are set out below.

Listed buildings

If you wish to repair or replace one or more windows, an application for Listed Building Consent will be necessary if the works will affect the special architectural or historic interest of the building. As a general rule consent is normally required. Please note that it is an offence to undertake works to a listed building without first obtaining Listed Building Consent.

Article 4 Directions

Houses which are not Listed Buildings can normally make external alterations without the need for a planning application. This is known as “permitted development”. However, some areas (such as some Conservation Areas) have Article 4 Directions placed upon them by the Secretary of State. The effect of these Directions can be to remove the permitted development rights of occupiers of single dwelling houses to replace, alter or introduce windows or doors without planning consent. In these areas a planning application will always be required.

Table 1 below sets out which areas in North Somerset have Article 4 Directions placed upon them that require you to obtain planning permission for new windows or doors:

Table 1.

Conservation Areas with Article 4 Directive	What requires permission
Banwell Conservation Area	Windows
Clevedon Conservation Area	Windows
Clevedon Triangle Conservation Area	Windows
Birnbeck Conservation Area	Windows
Melrose / Grove Park Conservation Area	Windows
Wrington Conservation Area	Windows
Nailsea, 11 – 15 Mayfair Avenue	Windows and doors

Flats or commercial property

If you live in a flat or occupy a commercial property you will require planning permission if you wish to replace your windows with units that are different in their material, method of opening or design. This is because flats and commercial properties do not have the same permitted development rights as dwellings.

Conditions on previous planning approvals

Even if you don't live in a Listed Building, an Article 4 area or a flat you will also require permission to replace a window if there is a condition attached to the planning permission for the property which removes the normal permitted development rights associated with the building.

You can check the planning permissions for more recent properties by using the free planning map which is on our website.

4) Traditional and historic windows

If you intend to replace traditional windows, it is important that you think carefully about the type of replacement window that you would like to use and try to match the original window as far as possible.

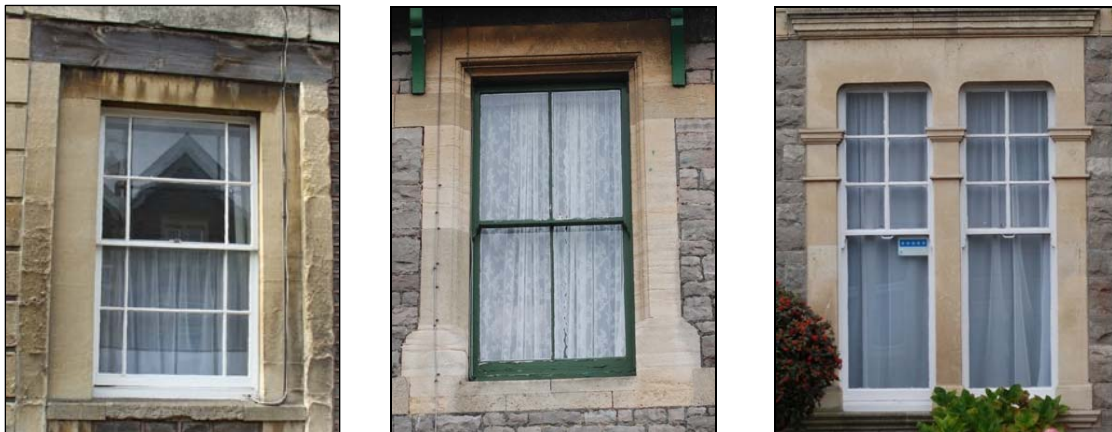
The like-for-like replacement of timber windows is normally acceptable when the existing timber is not repairable. These windows will usually have to be made to measure using treated timber and modern paints in order to significantly reduced the amount of maintenance required.

Caution is advised when considering the use of plastic windows (UPVC). Its appearance often differs noticeably from traditional timber. The texture of plastic frames often lacks any of the minor surface variations associated with the grain, knots and putty and can often sit at conflict against the traditional materials used in the rest of the building.

While the profile and sections of aluminium windows are usually thinner than PVC-u and are more able to respect the dimensions of timber windows, they do not offer the same depth of appearance as timber windows. This flat appearance does not normally look appropriate in historic buildings.

In North Somerset there are two main types of traditional timber window – sash windows and casement windows.

Sash windows



After their introduction from Holland, sliding sash windows were embraced by English classical renaissance designers in the middle of the 17th Century and their use continued until the early 20th Century. This much-favoured design started in a crude form which used wooden pegs to hold up the one sliding sash and developed a double-hung sliding sash which used cords, pulleys and weights to balance the sash so that it may be left open in any position. The construction of sash windows is derived from the principles of Classical Architecture which places importance on vertical orientation and attractive proportions. This relationship between window proportion and the building is critical, which is why inappropriate alterations to windows can have a disastrous effect on the visual appearance of the building.

The following three photographs illustrate the harmful impact of uPVC windows on the appearance of a building compared to the original timber sash windows. In each photograph the original sash windows can be seen on the right side.



In a sliding sash window the two sashes slide vertically past each other within the confines of the window frame and never protrude beyond the outer face of the wall.

In contrast, on modern replacement windows the opening sash will often be hung from the top, the side, centrally pivoted or in the 'tilt and turn' pattern, hinged at the bottom. When shut the window resembles a sliding sash window, but when open it protrudes at an angle from the frame. This usually harms the appearance of an old building as demonstrated in the two photographs shown below.



Some window manufacturers now offer plastic sliding sash windows however these do not replicate the proportions of traditional timber sliding sash windows and are often not appropriate for replacing traditional windows, especially in listed buildings or Conservation Areas.

Casement Windows

The other type of traditional window found in period properties, often in more modest or rural buildings, is the casement window. Three examples of casement windows are shown below.



The casement window pre-dates the sash window and is the first design that could be opened for ventilation. The traditional casement is almost always side-hung; some open inwards but more generally they open outwards. Casement windows may be found in single opening units or arranged in a group of up to four units to fill a larger opening with a mixture of side-hung and fixed casements.

There are various designs of glazing patterns in the casement which will differ depending on the size and proportions of the casement. A casement usually has one central vertical glazing bar and one or two horizontal glazing bars.

The construction of a traditional timber casement is such that the opening and fixed casements are built identically in size and are then fitted into a main frame. This gives the whole casement a balanced appearance.

Glazing patterns and glazing bars

The glazing of windows in domestic buildings was very rare in the 14th and 15th Century because glass was very expensive and difficult to produce in large sheets. As glass became more available, glazed panels for these windows would have been made up from small diamond shaped pieces of glass held together with lead. This diamond pattern started to be replaced with square panes in the late 16th Century. Modern replacement windows are available with strips of lead stuck to the surface of the plate glass. These are unacceptable because the single sheet of glass that is used does not produce the complex pattern of reflections created by small individual panes as they reflect the light at different angles. Timber glazing bars began to appear in casement windows in the late 17th Century but leaded-lights continued to be used well into the 18th Century.

Traditional timber windows have a wonderful variety of glazing bars. Glazing bars allowed the use of small panes of glass and contributed to the structural strength of the window frame. The development and design of glazing bars give a guide to the date the windows were manufactured and, therefore, an insight into the history of the building in which they are fitted.

Traditional timber glazing bars are proud of the face of the glass and therefore provide the window with a feeling of depth by casting shadows and reflections on the glass. In contrast, the glazing-strips in modern double glazed replacement windows are flat strips of plastic that are set between the glass and the sealed unit. The glass therefore has an unbroken flat surface with no illusion of depth. The result is a modern appearance which is not appropriate for traditional buildings.

This is clearly demonstrated by the two photographs below. The original sliding sash window is shown on the right whilst an inappropriate modern replacement is on the left with the top glazing bars set in between the two panes of glass.



The set-back or 'reveal'

Another important difference can arise if the modern replacement windows are fitted flush with the wall face without a set back or a 'reveal'. These 'reveals' are very important as they produce light and shade to the face of the building and a visual break to the continuous surface of the building's façade.



A deep window reveal with original timber window set back within.

5) How to maintain or repair traditional windows

Neglecting the maintenance of timber frames, particularly insufficient repainting to protect the timber from weathering, is a common problem. Regular maintenance is a cost effective way of extending the life of traditional windows for many years. It is often cheaper to retain and your existing well-maintained timber windows and repaint them every five years than to install new windows.

There are two main problems that occur in traditional timber windows if they are not regularly maintained:

1. Wood rot



'Wood rot' can often be found in the bottom rails and sills of timber windows when they have not been properly maintained. The rot may have spread further depending on how neglected the window has been. Total replacement of the window is usually not necessary or cost effective. It is generally a very simple process for a joiner to remove the damaged timber and insert new treated woodwork, giving old windows a new lease of life.

2. Draughts and badly fitting windows

Draughty, badly fitting and rattling windows can also be a problem. This is particularly true of sash windows. You do not need to replace with plastic (UPVC) windows to exclude draughts as traditional timber windows can benefit from new, high performance draught-exclusion systems. There are a number of companies that can fit these systems to your windows at the same time that they renovate the windows to dramatically improve their performance while still retaining their original character and appearance.

6) Deciding to replace or repair

We will always suggest that you consider repairing your existing windows. Remember that these windows may have been functioning perfectly well for many years and repair can be considerably cheaper than replacement.

Installing secondary glazing on the inside on of the original window is often a good and cheaper alternative to replacement. Besides increasing the thermal performance of windows, secondary glazing can have a number of other benefits including being highly effective at reducing noise transmission.

English Heritage has produced a guidance note about the use of secondary glazing within historic buildings. It provides advice on the principles, risks, materials and methods for upgrading the thermal performance of windows by the addition of secondary glazing. The guidance note is called Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings – Secondary glazing for windows and can be downloaded for free from www.english-heritage.org.uk.

7) How to submit applications

Use a planning agent

If you need to submit a formal application to obtain permission to replace or alter a window we strongly recommend that you employ the services of a professional planning agent. Details about how to find planning agents can be found on our website.

Use the Planning Portal

Over 60% of applicants use the Planning Portal website to submit their applications to us. By submitting your application via the Planning Portal you will reduce your printing and postage costs. The Planning Portal can be found at www.planningportal.gov.uk.

Submit the correct information

Information about what plans and documents to submit with your application can be found on our website. If you do not include all the required information your application will not be valid and will result in delays. In summary you will need:

1. The correct form completed in full which can be obtained from the Planning Portal at <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/applications/> .
2. The correct fee, where required. These fees are set nationally and change from time to time. Full information about fees is available on our website.
3. Detailed plans and drawings to clearly show the existing elevations and what you propose to do. This should normally include, amongst other things, proposed joinery details (including cross sections) normally at scale of 1:20 or in exceptional circumstances at a scale of 1:5.

This publication is available in large print, Braille or audio formats on request.

Help is also available for people who require council information in languages other than English.

Please contact 01275 888 811.