



# The Maintenance of Old Properties

## A guide funded by the Wallgate Townscape Heritage Initiative



**This document has been funded by the Wallgate Townscape Heritage Initiative to help owners of old buildings to understand the importance of regular, routine maintenance, and to recognise some of the signs of problems that can lead to further deterioration.**

Much of the value of our town and district centres comes from the historic buildings contained within them, but this value is being reduced due to lack of maintenance and inappropriate maintenance both of which can cause further damage.

---

## The Importance of Maintenance

---

Lack of maintenance is one of the major causes of deterioration within historic buildings, and keeping on top of routine defects should help to secure the building and ensure a viable long term future. Keeping on top of maintenance can prove to be a cost effective way of looking after your building. Spending a small amount on your building now could avoid costly repairs later – carrying out a minor repair now will likely be cheaper than rectifying the damage that can be done on top of carrying out the repair at a later date!

Inappropriate maintenance is also a contributing factor to decay in older buildings. The use of modern cement mortars has a harmful impact upon old buildings. The harder, more impervious character of cement as opposed to the softer more permeable lime mortar can stop moisture evaporation and trap moisture into the building, causing damp issues internally, but equally as important, trapping moisture into brickwork and stone,

which causes erosion to the material as the water freezes and expands.

Similarly, applying waterproof solutions to the outside of the building can also have the same damaging impact and should be avoided.

Plants can cause problems to your building. Seeds can get lodged on cornices, or in small mortar cracks, and if not rectified, the roots can cause further damage into mortar joints, offering an opening for water penetration. Similarly plants can grow in gutters, as well as having leaves block the gutters causing water to penetrate the building.

Once moisture has gotten into the building, the problems can be wider. The ability of plaster to draw moisture, a process known as capillary action, can transfer moisture into historic timbers which can cause wet rot and dry rot. If these timbers are hidden in roof spaces or behind the plaster, the problem can go unnoticed.

“

We purchased the former Victoria Hotel on Wallgate, and due to lack of maintenance over the years, there was a huge amount of damage to the building, much of which could have been avoided with regular routine maintenance. As property owners, we realise the importance of keeping on top of maintenance and the financial benefits this can bring.

**John Heaton,**  
The Heaton Group

”



“

As owner of an old property in the historic Wiend area of Wigan, I see it as my duty to ensure the building is maintained both to keep the area looking nice, and to keep my building performing at its best. Keeping on top of the maintenance, is essential for a restaurant to keep it operating smoothly for my customers.

**Howard Gallimore,**  
local property owner and proprietor of  
Gallimores Fine Restaurant

”

# Spotting the signs

## Brickwork and stone

Where moisture has penetrated brick and stone and become trapped, this moisture can freeze and expand in cold weather. As the moisture expands, it can 'blow' the face of the brick or stone, and this can then cause further exposure to moisture. This can also lead to further damage of the material and also lead to internal penetration. A major cause of this damage is inappropriate hard cement mortars. Traditional lime mortars are softer than the brick and stone and act as a conduit to let moisture evaporate from the building. Hard cement mortars should be avoided when carrying out repointing.

## Roofs

One of the most important parts of a building to keep in good repair. Internal inspection of loft spaces can provide an indication of a faulty roof. Damp purlins and beams can be a giveaway, however, this may not indicate the point of entry. Broken slates on the ground or in gutters are an obvious sign of a damaged roof. Missing ridge tiles are easily spotted, and should be rectified as these are a protective measure in vulnerable areas where roofs meet, however deteriorated pointing around these may be more difficult to spot. Valleys and abutments, where roofs and walls meet can also be a potential place for damage. Leadwork should be in good condition.



## Gutters and Downspouts

Blocked gutters from leaves and foliage can cause problems in gutters. Blockages can cause water to freeze and can cause cracks to downspouts. Damage to gutters can affect the fall of the gutter and can stop them draining.

Staining or algae growth around downspout joints can be a sign of leakage. Damp stains on walls and washed out mortar below gutters or behind downspouts can be a sign of damaged watergoods.



## Windows and Doors

Windows are often described as the eyes of the building, and their importance should not be underestimated. Timber windows and doors are exposed to the elements and as such their maintenance is crucial. Areas of rot and deterioration can be replaced with timber being spliced in and this is often more cost effective than new windows. Historic windows can stick, due to expansion in damp weather, and from excessive repainting. Sanding down and draught proofing can effectively sort these issues. NOTE – care should be taken when sanding historic windows as lead paint may have been used. Advice should be taken prior to carrying out.

## Condensation

Condensation is caused by warm air coming into contact with colder parts of the building. Black growth and mould can be a sign. Modern living now provides more outlets for moisture in the atmosphere such as kettles, cooking, showers, washing etc. However, in the pursuit of making buildings more resilient to heat loss, ventilation has been sacrificed, such as chimneys being capped, air bricks being blocked up, solid floors put in etc. re-opening of chimneys, and the use of a traditional fire can assist ventilation, whilst simple things such as opening a window after showering can reduce condensation.

## Do I need permission?

A Listed Building is one which has been placed on the National Heritage List for England, and there are currently over 500,000 across England. Wigan has over 500 and carrying out works to a Listed Building may often require Listed Building Consent. If you are the owner of a traditional historic building, it is advisable to check if the building is listed, and if any Listed Building or Planning Consent is required. REMEMBER, it is a criminal offence to carry out works to a Listed Building that cause damage to its particular character, and can be punishable by an unlimited fine and 2 years imprisonment.

Wigan has 23 Conservation Areas, and should works require planning consent, Council policy may require more detailed attention that may not normally be required for other properties. Again, it is always advisable to check with the Council prior to undertaking any works.

# Danger Signs to Look For

## Watergoods:-

- Staining on downspouts and brickwork
- Splashes of soil on base of walls can be an indication of poor drainage
- Blocked gullies

## Roofs:-

- Damp patches on ceilings
- Moss and plant growth on roofs
- Damp Purlins and beams in loft

## Walls:-

- Spalled brickwork
- Blistering paintwork

## Condensation:-

- Mould growth
- Peeling wallpaper

## Windows & Doors:-

- Sticking sash windows
- Peeled paint
- Rotting windows
- Draughts

ALWAYS TAKE CARE WHEN CARRYING OUT WORKS TO A BUILDING AND IT IS ADVISABLE TO USE A REPUTABLE BUILDER. IT IS ALWAYS ADVISABLE TO CONTACT THE LOCAL AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE IF ANY PLANNING CONSENTS ARE REQUIRED.

# We Can Help You

---

## Further Information:

---

### **Key Contacts: Wigan Council Conservation Officers:**

Ian Rowan: 01942 489 251

Richard MacDonald: 01942 489 229

Wigan Council also offers free, independent advice to help your business grow.

Contact us at: [business@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:business@wigan.gov.uk)

---

## Useful Websites :

---

**Heritage Counts:** [www.historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts)

**Historic England:** [www.historicengland.org.uk](http://www.historicengland.org.uk)

**IHBC: Institute of Historic Building Conservation:** [www.ihbc.com](http://www.ihbc.com)