

Repair or replace?

Whether to repair or replace a window will nearly always come down to the cost, although this is not always the case. Many people change windows as a first resort in making their home more sustainable, and more heat efficient. Whilst this is very commendable, little thought goes into either the cost effectiveness of such replacements or the savings they will make in changing their windows. With a top estimate of 15% of the total heat from a house lost through the windows, this is rarely a sensible first option for thermal efficiency.

When complete replacement is deemed necessary thought should be given on the impact on the building itself, and on the



street-scene, especially within sensitive areas of control, such as Conservation Areas, as this can have a dramatic impact on the appearance of the area.

With regards to historic buildings, it is generally better to retain as much of the original window as possible, and repair the rotten or broken elements, as this will retain a higher grade of wood than will generally be available today, and will also retain the historic section and style, which can often be hard to replicate. However, if the window is beyond sensible repair, then the best course of action would be to replace the window, in the same style, materials and size, even though this may require a bespoke window to be constructed, rather than get an properly, “off-the-shelf” window which may not fit or be in the same style.



What materials should I use?

Traditionally, windows have been made from materials which have been readily available, but also which have the strength to support the glazing. Until the C18th, oak or other similar hardwoods were used for the window, providing a readily available source of strong timber. This was gradually replaced during the C18th, with the introduction of slow growing softwoods, often wrongly referred to as pitch pine.

In replacing or repairing any windows, the correct timber needs to be used – a standard timber from a DIY store, such as Nordic pine, will not suffice – it is likely that this will be a fast grown commercial timber, with poor structural qualities, and will have little defence against rot or decay. It is also always advised that any timber used for construction be FSC certified, and is bought from a reputable source.

It is never recommended that Upvc or plastic windows be inserted into historic buildings. However, many people purchase Upvc windows on the basis that they are maintenance-free, will last longer than timber windows, and are being environmentally by insulating their house, none of which is completely correct. Whilst they may not need the same degree of care a timber window will require over its life, they still need looking after, seals checking, and of course cleaning. It can also readily be seen that Upvc windows do not last longer than good quality timber windows – with evidence in every street showing that timber windows can last over 300 years, whereas many Upvc windows will

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require replacing in an average of 20 years. In terms of environmental soundness, as long as the timber for any window is FSC certified, this will ensure that the timber used is taken from a sustainable source, and will not be damaging to the environment – opposing this, the creation of Upvc is a by-product of the oil and petrol industry, and through both its manufacture and degradation, releases more toxins into the atmosphere than many other industrial processes. Whilst the Upvc industry has improved in this aspect, and has made concerted efforts at recycling, it still cannot compare with FSC certified.

Double glazed or single glazed?

As a general rule, and one which is held nationally, through most Local Planning Authorities, and English Heritage, the use of double-glazed units in Listed Buildings is not supported in this District. Where such units have been installed, it is likely that this will result in enforcement action for their replacement. Furthermore, recent research by English Heritage has found that properly working single glazed windows, with appropriate draft excluders, can achieve nearly the same thermal efficiency as a double-glazed unit of the same quality.

In replacement windows on unlisted buildings, the loss of historic and detailed fabric is not recommended, and the original windows should be retained and repaired wherever possible. If timber replacements are to be used, then the glazing bars are either likely to be stuck on to the window, to retain the narrow detail of the original glazing bar, or the bar will increase up to twice the width, destroying the fine attention to detail paid in the design and construction of our traditional houses. New technology has allowed manufacturers to explore the use of double-glazed window panes, rather than using



