

What do I need ?

In order to undertake a maintenance survey on your property, you will need a pen and paper, some sketches of the floor plan and the elevations, a camera, a torch, and often a small knife, to test woodwork. Try to organise things into a file, so you can refer back to any previous reports, and also try to compile a history of the property, identifying any extensions or major alterations which have been carried out. You may also need a pair of binoculars, to look at high areas such as roofs and ridges. Once you have all this, start at the outside of the building at the roof and work your way down, then do the same on the inside, looking in every room and starting in the attic.

Roof coverings

Are there any loose/ cracked slates or tiles? Are the battens and nails still ok? Is there moss growing anywhere? Are there any climbing plants covering the roof or gutters? Do not use bitumen or similar to repair roofs, as this will prevent anything from being re-used in the future. When repairing or replacing tiles or slates, use natural materials, and ones which match the existing in colour and texture. Are the ridges in good order? Have they slipped and is the mortar still in place?

Roof timbers

Is there any evidence on the outside that the roof is failing? Are there any large bows or dips in the roof? On the inside of the roof, is there any mould or fungal growth? Is this evidence of either wet rot or dry rot?

Insulation

Is there any insulation present? Is it a breathable type? Is there any membrane between the cover and the timber, and if so is this breathable, or does it make the attic “sweat”? Never use spray insulation, as this will make repair or replacement of the roof much more difficult, and will prevent re-use of any materials, resulting in a more costly repair.

Chimneys

Are these standing straight, or leaning to one side? Are they capped or do they have pots? Is the mortar still present and in good order? Does the chimney “draw” from the inside, from each fireplace? If the stack is leaning, this may not be serious, but it is worth investigating.

Rainwater goods

Regularly clean out moss and leaves from the gutters, are they clear, and does water flow freely along the gutter and down the drain-pipe? Are there any leaks anywhere? Are there any plants growing behind or over the rainwater goods? If so, these need to be removed

External walls

What state is the pointing in? Whilst there may be some small gaps, the important thing is whether there are any water-traps – are there any flat surfaces or holes where water can pool or run into the wall? These need to be filled in with the appropriate mortar. Do not re-point unnecessarily. Are there any cracks in the walls, or in render? If so, these need to be monitored, to see if they are evidence of wall movement or rotation. Are there any big bulges in the wall? Again, this is evidence of the wall starting to fail. Is any render in good order or is it cracking or falling off? If so, this needs to be examined to discover the root of the problem.

Timber

Timber details such as joinery, floors, framing and joists can last indefinitely if maintained properly. Common defects are often caused by damp, fungal infestation, structural movement or ground movement. Take time to look at the roofing structure – are all the joists and purlins in good order? Is there any evidence of cracking or warping? Throughout the house, is there any evidence of beetle infestation (look for frass (sawdust) on the floor or in any small holes). Are there any cracks or splits? Is there any mould or rot on any of the timber?

Render

Render is often used for several reasons – firstly it can be used to hide problems, or to mask poor quality work, but more often it is used to give a clean finish to a building. Whatever the reason render has been used, it is essential to check the condition of any render, and ensure that it is working as it should. Firstly, examine the render and ensure that there are no cracks in it, which will let water in, and probably result in damage to the wall which you will not be able to see. Are there any bulges in it? Is it falling off anywhere? Does it sound hollow anywhere? All these are signs that the render is failing, and will probably need to be taken off and re-laid, although try and limit this to the area where the faults are.

Joinery

Any external joinery are more exposed to the elements than any other element of joinery, and deteriorate more rapidly if left uncared for. Any problems identified need to be addressed rapidly to prevent more damage to the joinery and to the building. Look at all the windows – is any of the glass cracked, and is all the putty in good order? Is there any evidence of rot or decay on the sills? Are any coverings, such as lead over canopies, in good order, or is it creased up, and not covering the timber? Are there any cracks or splits in any of the timber, where water can penetrate into the walls? Metal windows can suffer from corrosion, so they need to be regularly painted. Do all the windows and doors open freely, or do they stick in places?

Internal walls

Stains and damp patches in the inside of walls may indicate that something is wrong with the building on the outside, such as a leaking pipe. Are there any new cracks in walls, and if so are these structural or load-bearing walls? This can be a major problem, and you may need to get some professional advice

