

A GUIDE TO

# Keeping your Property In Good Repair



## This guide aims to help you keep your property in a good state of repair.

Your home is one of the most important aspects of your life and, as such, needs to be carefully looked after and properly maintained.

By planning the maintenance of your property you can save money and prolong the life of your home. By adopting a planned approach, as a homeowner you can largely avoid the need for unplanned emergency repairs. Providing a home that maintains its original character and sustains its value.

A planned approach means a programme for maintenance that recognises the factors that can lead to the deterioration of materials and parts of the building. It ensures that they are maintained to prevent premature failure. For example, there is no reason why

softwood timber windows should not last for many years as long as they are properly maintained. The cost of implementing a planned maintenance programme will invariably be far less than the costs resulting from a series of unplanned emergency repairs.

It is important to identify those parts of a building that have the potential to deteriorate, and to plan a regular maintenance programme accordingly.

Many maintenance problems are associated with roofs and there may be parts of the roof that are hidden when viewed from ground level. It is important that these less accessible areas are inspected regularly.



# REMEMBER! STAY SAFE.

**Do not take risks! If you're not sure if it is safe to do something, don't do it!**

**Make sure you know how to use ladders or other equipment safely.**

**If you do not feel confident, ask a professional to carry out the checks for you.**

If you are unable to gain access to parts of the building you want to inspect it is recommended that you employ the services of a professional building surveyor, architect or tradesperson, who has experience in building maintenance. You may wish to employ a professional to conduct the entire inspection.

Dumfries and Galloway Council's Trusted Trader Scheme helps people to choose reputable traders from customer feedback. The scheme is aimed mainly at home improvement traders. The traders are reviewed by customers as well as checked and monitored by us to make sure they're trading legally.

**Tel: 030 33 33 3000**

**[www.dumgal.gov.uk/trustedtrader](http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/trustedtrader)**



## Inside the Building

### Walls and Ceilings

Check ceilings and walls for signs of water coming in and try to find the cause of this by looking at the outside of the building.

### Roof Space or Attic

Only go into the roof space if it is properly floored and has fixed loft ladders. Check joists, rafters, joins between roofs and walls and other visible surfaces for signs of rot, damp or water damage.



## Outside the Building

### Roof

Don't go up onto the roof itself, it is dangerous and can actually cause damage. Look at the roof from outside your home (using binoculars if possible) and contact a qualified roofing contractor if it is damaged or leaking. Check the chimney isn't cracked or coming loose.

### Air Vents (at ground level)

These should be clear of the ground and covered with a grate to stop vermin getting in.

### Damp

This can be a serious problem. It can ruin interior and exterior décor, cause the growth of moulds and fungi and can result in wood rot and damage to the structure of your home.

### Walls

Look for cracks, areas of decayed stone, gaps in the pointing (cement between bricks or stones) and bulging or leaning walls. If you discover any cracks in the walls don't panic, these are often caused by settlement and are quite normal. However, if a crack becomes noticeably wider or goes through the stone and mortar of the wall contact a builder or surveyor for advice.

### Paintwork

Check for any bare wood on windows or doors and repaint if necessary as exposed, untreated wood can rot. Check the mastic (sealant between the window frame and the wall) for signs of wear and repair any defects.



## Drainage

Check gutters, down-pipes, drains and gratings for rust, cracks, leaks, loose fixings and blockages. Clear any plants or moss growing in the gutters which can cause a blockage and lead to leaks from the pipes and damage to the walls of your home. Damp patches on the wall can indicate a blockage in your drainage. Make sure drains are cleared properly, especially after heavy rain.

## Trees

Are there any trees next to the building which could hit telephone or power lines or damage the building? If so action may be required to cut these back.

# Checks and Inspections

## Chimneys

### Symptoms

Dampness or water penetration on the chimney breast, party walls or ceilings adjacent to the chimney.

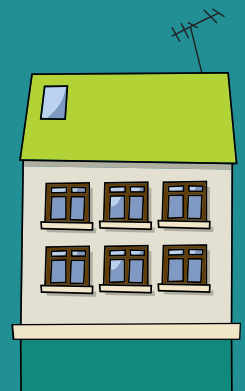
### Check for

Any obvious damage to the structure, render, pots or coping. Wear or damage to 'flashings', 'aprons' and 'soakers' (the lead coverings where the chimney meets the roof).

Any missing or cracked or perished mortar, cement pointing or bedding.

### Ensure that

Any unused chimneys are properly capped and vented to avoid any dampness forming within the flue. Defects or repairs are attended to promptly.



# Checks and Inspections

## Pitched Roofs and Dormers

### Symptoms

Damp patches or water penetration on ceilings or within roof space.

### Check for

Missing, loose, damaged or slipping tiles, slates, ridge or hip tiles, and any pointing (cement) which is missing, loose or perished.

Damaged, slipped or missing lead 'valleys', 'flashings' or 'aprons' (the lead coverings where different parts of the roof meet).

### Ensure that

Defective tiling, pointing, leadwork is attended to promptly. Roof gutters are kept clean and free from plant growth and silt. Older slate roofs are checked for signs of corrosion of the nail fixings.

## Flat Roofs

### Symptoms

Dampness or water penetration through ceiling.

### Check that

Roofing felt is not cracked, torn, punctured or lifting up in any areas. Water is draining freely from the roof and not ponding.

## Gutters

### Symptoms

Water overflowing or leaking from the gutter.

### Check that

The gutter sections are not blocked, loose, sagging or misaligned. Joints are properly made and sealed. Cast iron gutters are not corroded through. Gutter sections are not split or damaged. The rain water pipe is connected and not damaged. Gutters are cleaned out regularly.

## Masonry Walls

### Brickwork, Blockwork and Render

### Symptoms

Crumbling brick, block or stone work; mould or staining; 'efflorescence' (water causing salts to leech and stain the wall white). Loose or missing pointing (the cement in between). Cracked or loose render. Damp patches on walls internally.

### Check that

Surfaces are free from moss and vegetation, and pointing is in good condition. Render, decorative or protective coatings are in good order. The ground level doesn't cover air bricks and is lower than the damp proof course/membrane (DPC/DPM).



## Doors and Windows

PVC windows and doors should effectively be maintenance free with the exception of hinge and locking mechanisms. Timber windows and doors require regular maintenance in the form of repainting to maximise a trouble free lifespan.

### Symptoms

Leaks or draughts around the frames or opening units.

### Check that

Hinge and locking mechanisms are working properly. Lubricate regularly. Draught and weather seals are intact and in good condition. Renew as necessary. Mastic pointing around frames externally is intact and good condition.

Protective decorative coatings to timber frames is in good order. Repaint as necessary.

## Exterior Woodwork and Decoration

### Symptoms

Flaking, loose or blistered paintwork on exterior timber joinery. Timbers showing signs of rot or decay. Draughts around windows or doors.

### Check that

There are no areas of bare, untreated timber and that all exterior timbers are regularly treated with a suitable paint, preservative or stain in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. Any areas of timber affected by rot are repaired or replaced promptly. Timbers are not warped, shrunk or otherwise deformed.

## General Note

Many of these checks and inspections can be carried out from ground level around your house. Roofs and chimneys can also be checked from ground with the assistance of binoculars. It is recommended, however, that any inspection required at high levels should be carried out by a competent tradesperson.



# Mains Services

## Gas, Electricity, Water, Drains

General - Check that you know the location of the shut-off valves and main switches for incoming gas, water electricity supplies, that these are easily accessible and that family members know how to operate them.

### Gas

#### Symptoms

Smell or sound of gas escaping inside or outside the house. Smoke or unusual burning from any appliance.

#### Action

In the event of a suspected gas leak call the National Gas Emergency Number 0800 111 999 immediately. Open your windows and doors to let air in, make sure all gas appliances are turned off and turn the gas off at the mains if possible. Do not operate light switches and avoid using other electrical switches and appliances as this could trigger an explosion. Do not smoke, light a match or any other naked flame. Have all appliances serviced regularly and fit carbon monoxide detectors. Check condition of hoses and exposed pipework regularly for any damage.

### Electricity

#### Symptoms

Circuits keep tripping or fuses keep blowing. Smoke, unusual smells or noises from fittings or appliances.

#### Action

Check for loose or damaged fittings and accessories. Damaged / split / worn cables or accessories. Any exposed conductors.

Contact your electrical supplier or a suitably qualified and SELECT or NICEIC approved electrician.

### Water

#### Symptoms

Flooding, leaks, drips or damp areas on walls, floor, ceilings etc.

#### Action

Check for leaks and drips at taps, valves, joints, radiators and areas of exposed pipework. Check pipes, flexible hoses and fittings for any damage or wear. Check external overflows. Fully lag all pipes within the roof space or any other unheated areas. In the event of a burst pipe shut off the main stopcock and open all the taps to drain down the system. If water is running into any light or electrical fitting disconnect the appropriate circuit at the fuse box. Contact a plumber immediately.



## Drains

### Symptoms

Foul smells from sinks, drains, traps or gullies. Water not draining from bath, sinks or drains.

### Action

Check sinks and drain traps for blockages. Remove any debris from traps and gullies. Try using a plunger or drain cleaning fluid as per manufacturer's instructions. If necessary contact a plumber.

## Dampness

### Symptoms

Condensation forming internally on windows, walls and other cold surfaces, especially in the kitchen and bathroom. Mould growth on corners of rooms, behind or under furniture. Damp patches or staining on walls especially above skirting.

### Action

The main causes of dampness are condensation, rising damp and penetrating damp.

**Condensation** is generally the result of a lack of heating, ventilation and insulation combined with lifestyle.

Ensure that rooms are adequately heated and ventilated. Bathrooms and kitchens should be fitted with extractor fans, preferably with a humidistat and these should be used whenever cooking, bathing or showering.

**Rising damp** is generally the result of an absence or failure of a damp proof course/membrane (DPC/DPM). 'Bridging' is where the external ground levels are higher than the DPC/DPM - they should be minimum 150mm below. Specialist treatments may be required.

**Penetrating damp** is generally the result of a defect or failure of a building element such as roof tiles, flashings, masonry, windows etc. Such problems should be attended to promptly by a competent contractor.

## Wet Rot

Wet rot affects wood habitually exposed to water or in direct contact with damp areas.

### Symptoms

Soft or saturated wood that breaks up easily. Bubbling on paintwork and/or the appearance of fungal growths.

## Dry Rot

Dry rot affects wood often hidden from sight in 'voids' (e.g. roof spaces) and unventilated areas.

### Symptoms

Cube shaped cracking of wood.

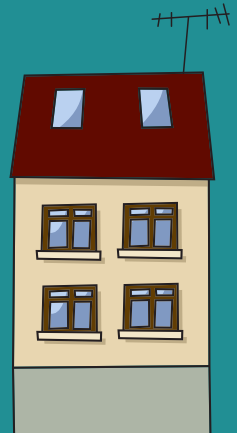
Appearance of fungi, fruiting bodies and/or root like strands on timber, plaster and masonry. Suspected dry rot should be referred immediately to a specialist firm for confirmation and any treatment required. Ensure all treatments are covered by insurance backed guarantee.

## Frequency of inspections

Regular inspections are essential. You should develop the habit of looking critically at your property on a continuous basis. This helps to build up a picture of the property and how it is performing. In addition, it is always advisable after a storm, whether wind, rain or snow, to carry out an inspection of vulnerable areas. Look particularly for damage to roof coverings, chimneys and metal flashings that may provide a route for water penetration into the house. An inspection of attics and roof voids for any sign of water should also be done at this time. Planned maintenance inspections need to be carried out in an ordered way. A casual approach should be avoided. However, not every element needs to be examined in detail on every occasion as elements like stone walls, for example, will not change significantly within a period of a few years.

## Safety considerations

Before undertaking an inspection you must assess any risks involved e.g. difficulty of access, slippery surfaces, loose or broken glass. It is advisable to wear heavy-duty gloves and to wear eye protection when clearing gutters of accumulated debris. A facemask is also recommended when clearing pigeon droppings. Always engage a fully qualified electrician and gas fitter to carry out inspections of the relevant services and appliances. The National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC) recommends that electrical systems be checked every ten years. The major issue with respect to safety is working from ladders. Falls from ladders by house owners working on or inspecting their property are a frequent occurrence. As a rule, a tradesperson should do all inspections from ladders above one storey height.



Element	Frequency (months)			Possible action during inspection
	6	12	12-60	
Roof coverings		✓		Remove any debris and plant growth
Flat roofs		✓		Remove any debris and plant growth
Gutters/Valleys/ Downpipes	✓			Remove any debris and plant growth
Flashings		✓		Temporarily replace slipped metal elements
Rooflights		✓		Remove any debris and plant growth
Chimneys (views from ground)	✓			
Chimneys (close inspection)		✓	✓	Every year if accessible from roof level, longer where access scaffolding required. Remove plant growth.
Projecting stone features		✓		Remove any debris and plant growth
Main stonework, including pointing			✓	
Roughcast / pebbledash / render		✓	✓	Visual inspection from ground level every year. Check for delamination and or crazing by surface tapping every 5 years
Limewash/painted masonry surfaces		✓		
Windows and doors		✓		
External Paintwork	✓			
Vents	✓			Clear any blocked vents

## General Advice

### Buildings Insurance

Buildings insurance is a normal prerequisite of having a mortgage on your property. Even if you don't have one, building insurance will offer peace of mind and protection for your property against unforeseen events.

When choosing a policy ensure that it provides adequate cover for your house against all major perils and the full rebuild cost should it be totally destroyed. Read policy documents carefully to ascertain any specific exclusions or excesses which may apply.

### Smoke Alarms

By law all new houses have to be fitted with mains powered smoke alarms and in the interest of safety, all homes should be equipped with at least one.

Smoke alarms should ideally be fitted in hallways adjacent to bedroom and living area doors and ideally be interlinked if more than one is fitted.

Alarms should be tested regularly and batteries should never be removed for any reason other than to fit a new one.

### Fire Extinguishers

It is also advisable to keep a fire extinguisher and/or a fire blanket available in the house.



## Contact Us

We have a range of leaflets on different topics available on request. If you would like further information on the types of assistance available to homeowners please contact:

**Dumfries and Galloway Council**  
**Strategic Housing**  
**Kirkbank House, English Street, Dumfries, DG1 2HS**

Tel: 030 33 33 3000

Email: [strategichousing@dumgal.gov.uk](mailto:strategichousing@dumgal.gov.uk)

[www.dumgal.gov.uk/article/15101/Housing](http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/article/15101/Housing)