

# Checking your building

This leaflet provides you with some  
general information on how to check  
your building for potential problems.



## Why you should check your building

Maintaining a building is an on-going process. Just as an MOT is required for a vehicle, it is useful to carry out regular inspections to your property to ensure it remains wind and watertight and to safeguard your investment. Some insurance companies require this as part of their agreement with the policy holder.

It is therefore a good idea to regularly set aside funds so that you are able to keep on top of any necessary repairs. Prevention is always better than cure. Carrying out routine maintenance is the best way to make sure that problems are identified and dealt with quickly and cheaply. You should try and inspect your building at least once a year, preferably in spring and after periods of bad weather e.g snow and high winds.

## How to check your building

You can carry out a few simple checks on your own building. Draw a sketch of the building so you can mark on any problems.

You will also need some equipment - a camera, torch, binoculars a long measuring tape and someone to help.

If you are not confident to do this yourself, you can hire someone such as a building surveyor or building contractor. They will give you a report on the condition of your building. There will be a charge for this so make sure that you have the agreement of your neighbours beforehand if you live in a shared property.

## Stay Safe

Don't take any risks. If you are not sure if it is safe to do something, don't do it.

Work round the building marking your findings on a sketch or diagram and take photos where possible.

You should not go on the roof; this is a job for a professional. You may be able to inspect it from another high building, for example, from a neighbour's house.

# External Inspection

## Chimney pots

- Inspect to see if they are secure and not broken.

## Chimneys

- See whether they are leaning. Are the bricks damaged? Is there mortar missing?

## Flashings

This is the lead sheeting around chimney stacks and where your roof and brickwork meet. They prevent water getting in at the edge of slates or tiles.

- Have they slipped or are they missing? Some chimneys may have a mortar fillet instead of lead flashing. Look and see if this is cracked, loose or crumbling.

## Tiles or slates

- Check whether they have slipped, are missing or broken
- Check for build up of moss

## Flat roof check

- Check for damage to felt and flashings. Ensure they are not lifting or torn
- Look for areas of pooling.

## Gutters and downpipes

- Check for rust, cracks, leaks and loose fixings.
- Check they are clear from blockages like slates, plants, earth, leaves or birds nests.
- Get gutters cleaned regularly.
- Ensure that they are running freely, especially when there are periods of heavy rain.

## Bricks & mortar joints

- Are brick faces or the mortar joints between bricks eroded or crumbling? Check for cracks in the mortar or silicone seals around windows and doors. Poor brickwork may allow rainwater to penetrate
- Remove any vegetation that may have grown. Climbing ivy can cause damage over time and also allow rodents to climb into roof spaces.



## Damp proof course

- Check that there is at least 150mm (6 inches) clearance from the damp proof course to ground level. Older properties may not have a damp proof course.

## Rendering/ timber cladding

- Is it in good condition and weather tight? Is it damaged or loose? You may need to replace areas of rendering or re-fix cladding.

## Windows and Doors

- Paint your timber windows and doors regularly (usually every 3 to 5 years but it can depend on conditions) as this will help preserve them. Pay special attention to sills, as they are often the first part to suffer from rot, and the place where water ingress can lead to rot below.
- Replace mastic sealant and putty if it is in poor condition. It keeps out draughts and stops water penetration.
- Getting older timber windows and doors repaired and draught proofed is often much cheaper than getting them replaced.
- Keep windows clean making sure to clean the frame as well as the glass.
- Replace any cracked or broken glass.
- Condensation between the panes of double glazing units usually means that the seals

are compromised. Contact the manufacturer if still under warranty; if not, contact a reputable glazier for advice.

- Check around door post bases and letter boxes for signs of rot or damage.

## Fascia & Soffits

Fascia and soffits are basically the coverings you see at your roofline, on top of the wall head. They usually cover the roof rafters and provide a fixing point for the guttering. Originally these were mostly made from timber but more recently UPVC has been used as an alternative.

Care and maintenance in the form of painting or weather-sealing should be carried out regularly.

## Gullies and gratings

- Have they got grids on the top? Are all the waste pipes pouring properly into them and are they emptying correctly? Are the gullies blocked with grass or leaves or overflowing? If so, clear out any debris to allow free flow into the gully.

## TV Aerial Satellite Dish

- Make sure they are securely fixed. Check after storms and high winds.

## External water pipes and taps

- Are they effectively lagged against frost? Make sure that the stop valve is turned off in winter and the tap left in an open position.

## Paths and boundaries

- Is there anything which could cause a trip or fall? Are railings or walls in good condition?
- Keep wooden fences well preserved to stop rot and decay.
- Clear weeds between paving stones.
- Make sure that planting of trees and shrubs are kept well away as roots can cause damage to paths and foundations.

## Air vents (at ground level)

- These should be clear of the ground and covered with a grating to stop vermin getting in.
- Replace any damaged vents.

## Preventing Rot

- If you get a roof leak or leak from a pipe or overflow, fix the leak and ventilate the area well to dry timbers quickly. Lift floorboards and use dehumidifiers if necessary.
- Make sure airbricks (a brick or brick-sized metal or plastic box that is hollow or perforated and used for ventilation) are not blocked. Lack of ventilation can lead to rot in timbers of the sub floor.
- If rot is suspected contact a suitably qualified timber specialist for advice.



# Internal Inspection

## Roof space

You should only go into the roof space if it is properly floored and it's safe to do so. If you are at all unsure about checking items in the roof space you should hire a professional such as a building surveyor to carry out this work.

Check joists, rafters, joints between roofs and walls and other visible surfaces for signs of rot, woodworm, damp or water damage.

If rot is suspected, contact a suitably qualified timber specialist for advice.

Insulation should be adequate.

If you install extra insulation make sure that ventilation is maintained or that ventilation is improved where necessary

Don't over clutter your loft as adequate ventilation is required.

Don't keep heavy items balancing on joists.

Don't store heavy items unless your loft is sufficiently floored.

Don't cover air vents with insulation material.

## Inspect your water tank

- Make sure that it is well insulated.
- Make sure that pipe work is adequately lagged to prevent frost damage.
- Make sure that your water tank has a cover.

- Are there lead pipes you need to replace?

## Ceilings

- You should inspect the ceiling for signs of water coming from a damaged roof. Look for obvious signs like stains, mould or loose plasterwork.
- Contact an electrician if staining is beside light fittings or any other electrical equipment.

## Floors

- Make sure floorboards are not loose.
- Check flooring for signs of rot or woodworm. If a problem is suspected contact a suitably qualified timber specialist for advice.

Homeowners need to be aware that, not only are you legally responsible for any accidents caused by defects in your building, such as falling masonry, but failure to properly maintain the fabric of your home may affect the value of your home.

It is strongly recommended that you have adequate building and contents insurance.

Owners of flats must also bear in mind that they are responsible for maintaining not only the interior of their home but also the common parts of the property, such as the gutters, roof, internal hallways and stairs etc.

## What do I do if I live in a block of flats/tenement?

You can inspect common stairs, landings and passages for the following:

- increasing cracks for example between stair treads
- treads which are uneven or worn away
- loose or missing balusters or rails
- loose plasterwork
- broken or inadequate locks on main doors
- broken or rotten stair windows.

If you feel you are unable to undertake any repair work please see our leaflet 'Finding a reliable contractor' for further information. For more information contact the Private Sector Housing Team at:

[private.housing@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:private.housing@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

Tel: **01467 534753**



