

**PRESERVING  
VICTORIAN  
&  
EDWARDIAN  
HOUSES**

*A Guide for Owners  
and Occupiers*



Planning & Leisure



## SUFFOLK COASTAL'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Although most people's impression of the traditional Suffolk house is the vernacular timber framed thatched cottage, there are also many other building types, including later 18th, 19th, and early 20th Century houses which together make up the County's attractive architectural heritage.

The vast majority of these later houses were built in brick. The use of brick became popular during the 18th Century and by the end of the Century it had supplanted timber framing as the most common method of building new houses. This, coupled with improvements in transport and the development of mass production techniques, significantly extended the resources of local designers and builders.

Generally, the design of most Victorian and Edwardian houses in towns, villages and the countryside imitated the changes in style that took place in the designs for the more grander houses. Facades often incorporated tall sash windows and classical styles were adopted for the detailing of elements such as eaves, verges, windows and door surrounds. The use of pattern books became widespread and a very high standard of workmanship was often achieved.

In the recent past, as fashions changed, it became popular to "modernise" these buildings. As a result many have been inappropriately altered, for example, by replacing original windows and doors, or changing the roof finish. Painting or rendering over the original facing brickwork has also become commonplace when repairs are undertaken.

When you need to repair, renovate or modernise older houses you need to think very carefully about the effect that any changes may have. If you change the doors, the windows, or the materials of the walls and roof in an inappropriate way it will undermine the original design. Some changes cannot be reversed and the "period" character of a house could be lost forever if your proposals show no regard to its original character. **Furthermore, it is very likely to affect the value of your property as potential buyers are now prepared to pay more for houses which retain their original features.**

**This leaflet provides advice on choosing methods of repair and types of replacements which are in keeping with Victorian and Edwardian houses.**

### WHEN REPAIRS ARE NEEDED

Every house needs repairing occasionally and regular maintenance can save costly repairs later. When work is required it is important to carry it out using traditional materials, techniques and details to match those existing so that the property retains its character and contributes to the appearance of the street.

### BEFORE YOU START

You may need Planning Permission, Listed Building Consent or Building Regulation Approval for certain works to your house so check with the Planning Department before you start. **It is especially important to seek advice if you live in a conservation area and essential if the work affects a Listed building.** Even if you do not need approval the Planning Department can give you advice on techniques and materials to suit your house.

#### ORIGINAL FEATURES PRESERVED

- Chimney retained
- Original dormer window
- Natural slate or clay tile roof
- Original verge and eaves detailing
- Sash window
- Brickwork with traditional bonding and pointing
- Original decorative cornice and surround to bay window
- Recessed door with glazed fanlight over
- Original painted panelled front door
- Tiled front path and decorative edging
- Hedge or railings on low brick wall
- Traditional wrought iron gate

#### DON'T CHANGE THIS.....INTO.....THIS

#### UNSYMPATHETIC ALTERATIONS

- Chimney stack removed or capped
- Inappropriate heavy concrete tiles
- Overlarge modern dormer window
- Modern eaves and verge details
- Brick soldier course over window
- Satellite antennae
- Stone cladding
- Window openings altered and original lintels removed
- Decorative cornice and surround removed
- Imitation Georgian windows
- Cement render on brickwork
- External meter box
- Recessed porch enclosed
- Unsuitable hardwood door
- Paved front path
- Ranch style fence or concrete block front wall
- Modern gate



*This drawing illustrates some of the important features which make up a typical Victorian/Edwardian house and shows the effect of unsympathetic alterations.*

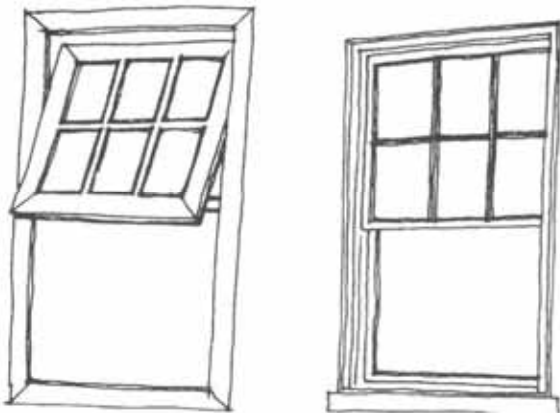
## WINDOWS

The design of the windows on a house is extremely important not only to the appearance of the house itself but also to the appearance of the street scene generally. Most of the original windows on Victorian and Edwardian houses were timber vertical sliding sashes. These windows have a very strong vertical emphasis which visually balances the horizontal appearance of groups of buildings and the street as a whole.

If your windows need attention, explore the options available, as total replacement may not be necessary and in many cases simple repairs can be made at a relatively low cost.

**If you are having problems with your existing windows remember manufacturers of replacement windows put a lot of effort into trying to persuade you to buy their products. They spend a lot on advertising and their salesmen want to earn their commission. So before ripping out your original windows think very carefully.**

Windows which are just draughty, rattle, stick or let in excessive noise may only require a general overhaul. Both traditional timber and metal windows can be improved by the addition of modern sealing systems which will eliminate these problems. The refurbishment of existing windows can be undertaken by a carpenter/joiner or blacksmith, or by one of the specialist companies which now exist, **often at a fraction of the cost of total replacement.** In many cases the installation of secondary double glazing should be given serious consideration if further insulation against heat loss or noise is found to be necessary.



*The crudely detailed plastic replacement window on the left bears little resemblance to the traditional quality of the original vertical sliding sash timber window alongside.*

Windows with areas of rot or rust may be able to be repaired rather than replaced. This involves cutting out the defective area and replacing it with a new piece of timber or metal. Sometimes just part of the window needs replacement. If replacement of the whole window is necessary, note the proportions of the window and how it is set in the opening in relation to the face of the wall. The way the window opens and the relationship between the opening lights and the fixed lights is important, as is the size and proportions of the individual panes of glass. All these features, together with the profiles of the frames and the glazing bars should be faithfully replicated if the architectural integrity of the house is to remain intact.

**Standard modern replacements made out of plastic or aluminium never match the detailing of traditional timber and metal windows.** Those which claim to be of a traditional pattern and/or of a certain "classical" period are merely crude imitations. Plastic windows in particular, have sections which are flat and wide and instead of proper glazing bars plastic strips are often stuck inside the sealed double glazed units. Very often replacements for sliding sash or side hung casement windows end up having top hung opening lights.

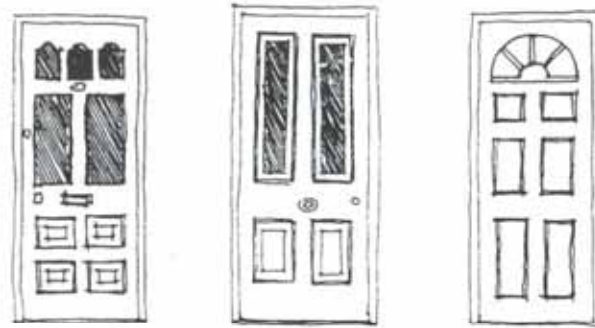
**Plastic windows are also not entirely "maintenance free". Seals, catches and springs have a limited life. Repair can be difficult and sometimes impossible.** If replacement is unavoidable, instead of using such windows, by far the best option is to have exact replicas made to match in the same material by a firm which is experienced producing traditional windows.

**Do not change the shape or size of openings so that standard windows can be fitted** as this will severely disrupt the original design of the house and will invariably involve the loss of the original decorative detailing on the window surrounds. Also, never replace rubbed or special shaped brick arches with plain brick solder courses supported on standard metal lintels.

Windows, traditionally, almost always had a white painted finish, which is still the most acceptable today. Stain and varnish should not be used as the result is historically inappropriate and in many cases will break up the visual unity in the street scene created by the widespread use of white paint.

## DOORS

The front door is almost always the focal point of any house. The original doors in most Victorian and Edwardian houses were panelled and painted. Often doors were half glazed, some had etched or coloured leaded glass. Wherever possible try to retain the original door, having it repaired rather than replaced. If replacement is unavoidable the best option would be to have a copy made of the original. Most carpenters/joiners are able to do this relatively easily.



*Left and centre two examples of attractive original Victorian front doors. Right - modern replacements are a poor substitute.*

Care should be taken if an "off the shelf" replacement is used as many "period" doors, such as those with the semi-circular glazed fanlight, are poor modern designs based very loosely on historical styles and as such are not really appropriate for Victorian and Edwardian properties. If you have to choose a standard door then pick a door which is as close as possible to the style of the original. Unless matching an original, varnished hardwood doors should be avoided. Plastic or aluminium doors should not be used.

## ROOFS

The type of roof finish is very important in terms of the overall appearance of any house. Many older properties have very attractive roofs, usually comprising natural slates or clay plain tiles or pantiles. Often they are finished off with a variety of decorative ridge tiles.

**If your roof needs attention it is advisable to consult a professional surveyor rather than relying solely on the view of a roofing contractor. Problems with a roof are seldom due to the slates or tiles themselves failing.** It is usually due either to slipped or missing tiles, rusting fixing nails or rotting battens. Sometimes problems are compounded by lack of underfelt or the existing felt needs replacement. When a roof has to be stripped often the majority of slates or tiles can be salvaged for reinstatement with any missing being made up with second-hand materials. Any decorative elements should be carefully removed and replaced upon completion.

**If you have to replace the roof covering, large modern concrete tiles should be avoided because they change the appearance of the roof so much and look crude and heavy especially compared to slates or plain tiles. Also they are considerably heavier than slates and often heavier than clay tiles, so the roof structure and walls of the house may be adversely affected by the extra weight.** The junction between different roof coverings on adjoining houses can be a further source of failure which would not arise if the original material was reused. If for any reason you have to change the roof finish, you should choose a new material which resembles as closely as possible the shape, colour and texture of the original covering.



*Ill considered modernisation, including re-roofing with heavy concrete tiles, can have disastrous effects both visually and structurally.*

## EAVES, GABLES AND GUTTERS

The detail at eaves and gables should not be altered and decorative bargeboards, soffits, fascias etc., should be repaired or reinstated rather than replaced with inappropriate modern designs. Care should be taken when repairing roofs to make sure that roof lines remain exactly the same so that there will not be the need for any bulky boxed-out detailing at the eaves or gables.

Original cast iron gutters, hopper heads and downpipes should be retained if possible. When replacement is necessary, new cast iron is the most desirable option as it is still manufactured. Cast aluminium is made to similar sections and its use would certainly be more appropriate than plastic.

## CHIMNEYS

Chimneys are an important feature on the skyline of all the Districts towns and villages and are an integral part of the design of virtually all older houses. All original stacks should be kept if at all possible and certainly the main stacks should be retained even if the chimney is no longer needed. Stacks should not be reduced in height because it undermines the original design of the building and invariably involves the loss of decorative detailing. Where they were part of the original design, chimney pots should be retained or reinstated if they have been removed in the past.

## WALLS

Over the past two hundred years most older buildings in the area were built of local soft red or white bricks with white lime mortar joints. Modern buildings are constructed with harder bricks usually with a grey cement mortar. The "soft" structure of older buildings has the advantage of allowing them to move to some degree. However, it does mean that the mortar joints can erode over time and that when walls become damp bricks may spall (this is where the face of the brick breaks away). Repairs and repointing are therefore sometimes going to be necessary.

You may think that the best way to remedy this is to repair the damage with a cement mortar or to paint, render, pebble dash or stone clad your walls. This is certainly not advisable as excessive moisture can become trapped within the wall causing more damage. Also, applied finishes will require more maintenance in the future than the original facing brick. Certainly, such changes will adversely effect the character and appearance of your house.

**The careful cutting out of the damaged bricks by hand and repointing is what is required, but you must ensure that a soft lime mortar is used, mixed to match the existing and finished with pointing to match the original. A mortar with a high cement content is likely, in the long term, to cause a great deal of damage because it will trap moisture inside the bricks and will cause them to spall even more.**

## DORMER AND BAY WINDOWS

Dormer and bay windows are distinctive features on many old houses and should be retained in their original form. Traditional bay windows in particular, are a valuable asset to a house as they make the rooms they serve larger and lighter. However, if they are altered in an inappropriate manner they can undermine the appearance of the building and can actually devalue the property. Adding a new bay window to a house which was originally designed without one should, in most cases, be avoided as this will invariably compromise the original design.



*The loss of original details, inappropriate replacement window and addition of an overlarge dormer has seriously damaged not only the appearance of the house on the left but also its relationship with those alongside.*

Alterations to existing dormer windows or the introduction of bulky, oversized or box-like flat roofed dormers should be avoided. Such changes can be particularly disruptive on buildings which form part of a unified terrace or group of houses.

## PORCHES

If your property has an original projecting porch or canopy it is important this is retained. However, a typical detail on many Victorian and Edwardian houses is an open, recessed porch. Although it may be tempting to convert this space into a draught lobby by constructing a screen door across the front, the appearance of the property invariably suffers so it is important that this space should not be enclosed. It may sometimes be possible to form a draught lobby internally, beyond the existing front door, thereby not affecting the external appearance of the house at all.

New projecting porches and canopies pose a problem as they can disrupt the rhythm of the elevation of a terrace or a group of similar houses. Porches which do not respect the style of an individual property can also be very harmful, so their design should be considered very carefully. If a porch or canopy cannot be added in a visually satisfactory way the temptation to add one should be resisted.



*Enclosing a recessed porch should be avoided.*

## DETAILING

Decorative detailing was a favourite of the Victorians and Edwardians and it added that "final touch" to their buildings, so it is important that it is retained. Elements such as moulded cornices, console brackets, string courses, column capitals,

moulded or carved brick, terracotta work, decorative tiles, metalwork, stained glass and intricate joinery work were an essential part of the design of houses and are well worth retaining and repairing.

Modern additions to houses such as service connections for gas, electricity, telephone and televisions can all disfigure a building, especially attractively designed period houses. Make sure you know exactly what these utilities are proposing before they carry out any works to your house. They often use standard connection details because it is cheap and quick. With a little thought there may be better ways to accommodate these services without making such an adverse impact.

Meter boxes and satellite antennae can be particularly problematic. Meter boxes for gas supplies are now available which can be set in the ground. Electricity meters can be retained internally. **Satellite antennae are likely to require Planning Permission especially if placed on the front elevation of a house. In any event this should be avoided on any older property. Listed Building Consent will be required for the erection of a satellite antenna on a Listed building.**

## FRONT GARDENS

The front gardens of houses and the treatment of their boundaries is invariably a prominent feature in the streetscene. Original boundary treatments around Victorian and Edwardian buildings often would have been a simple hedge, a timber palisade fence, a decorative brick wall or iron railings. In some instances impressive and elaborate designs in brick, render and ornamental ironwork were constructed. Whatever the case they were very important to the attractiveness of the building and to the streetscene as a whole.



*Loss of original boundary details and inappropriate use of front gardens can spoil an otherwise attractive streetscene.*

Original boundary treatments, especially those built for a terrace or a group of houses, should not be altered or demolished, and every effort should be made to reinstate those which have been lost. If original boundaries, for example front railings, are missing then it is often possible to trace photographic evidence, or failing that, it may be appropriate to copy surviving examples elsewhere in the area.

If no evidence exists then simple timber palisade fencing, simple iron railings, or a low hedge would be appropriate in most cases. Alternatives, like "ranch style" fencing and precast concrete block walls, are wholly inappropriate and should not be used.

Every effort should be made to retain or reinstate any attractive tiled front paths and decorative edgings. Once a common feature on many Victorian and Edwardian properties, many have now been lost.

Generally, with older houses, it was only the larger properties which were designed with frontages large enough to comfortably accommodate driveways. **With small houses, the terraced and semi-detached properties, the setting of the house and the character and appearance of the whole street can be severely damaged if the area in front is converted into car parking spaces.** Paving driveways and parking areas with modern concrete blocks can appear very intrusive and is inappropriate in most traditional locations.

## TO SUM UP

Your house is almost certainly going to be your most valuable possession. It pays in the long run to look after it properly – **money spent on maintenance now can save costly repairs or replacements later.** The loss or replacement of original features should be a last resort – **there are plenty of people who are eager to sell you their products or services whether it suits your house or not.**

Materials for repair or renovation should be chosen very carefully if your house is not going to look odd in relation to its neighbours. If it does end up "over modernised" then it may well be worth less than those which remain unaltered.

**If your house has already lost some of its original features then reinstatement may be a possibility. Look at unaltered details on houses nearby, they will guide you in the right direction.**

**If you would like any further information or advice about repairing or improving your house or looking after any of the area's historic buildings then contact the Conservation and Design Section, Planning & Leisure Department, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Melton Hill, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 1AU. Tel. (01394) 383789.**