

Caring For Your Home



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Section 1

How to identify simple problems with your home

Section 2

What to do if you find a problem

Section 3

Contacting a Builder

Section 1 - How to identify simple problems with your home

Caring For Your Home

Your home needs looking after. If you spot a problem quickly it can often be put right cheaply, but if it is left it may cause a lot of damage which can end up being very expensive to put right. This guide tells you the important things to look for and what to do if you find a problem.

How to inspect the outside of your house.

1 Chimney Pots

Are they leaning or broken?

2 Chimney

Is it leaning or are there any damaged bricks? Is the pointing missing or perished?

3 Flashings

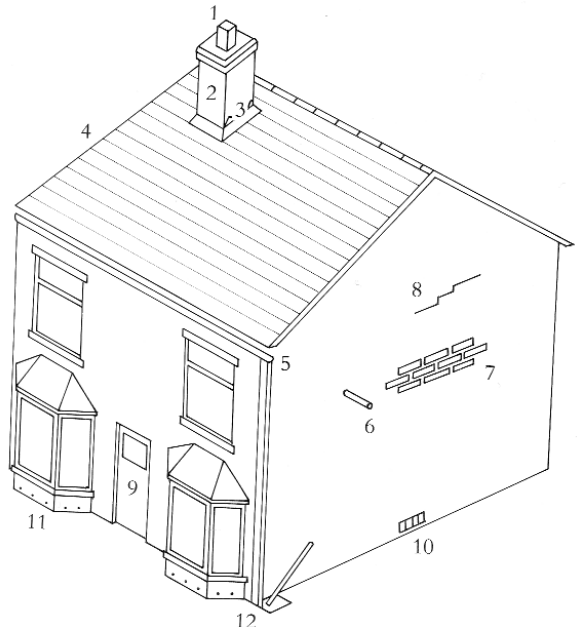
These prevent the water getting in. Are they slipped or missing?

4 Roof

Are there any broken, missing or slipped slates or tiles?

5 Gutters and Downpipes

Are the gutters leaking or are they blocked with leaves or vegetation. Even a small leak will damage bricks, rot wood and cause damp if it is not quickly repaired.



6 Overflow Pipes

If these are leaking it means that a water tank or toilet cistern is not working properly, repair it very quickly before any damage or damp is caused.

7 Bricks and Mortar Joints

If the bricks or mortar joints between the bricks are damaged or crumbling they may allow damp in.

8 Cracks in the Wall

If cracks suddenly appear or become much worse, it is best to get advice or ask a surveyor to have a look.

9 Doors and Windows

Wood will rot if it is not properly protected with paint or wood stain. Check whether the paint is cracked, loose or peeling.

10 Airbricks

These help stop the floors rotting by allowing air to circulate underneath. Do not block them with soil or new paving and make sure that they are clear and clean.

11 Damp Proof Course

Most houses have a waterproof layer to stop rising damp. Make sure that earth or new paving is kept six inches below this or you may get damp.

12 Gulleys

Has it got a grid on the top? Are all the waste pipes pouring properly into it? Is it emptying properly?

Section 2 - What to do if you find a problem

- **Roofs**

Doing work on a roof can be dangerous so it is best to use a builder. (See page 12 - 17)

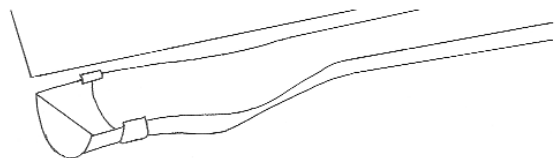
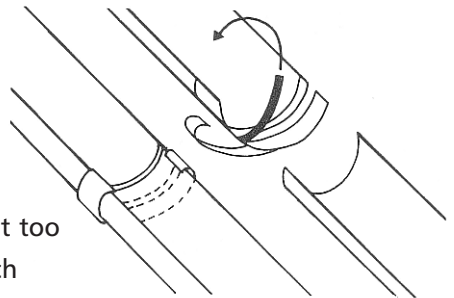
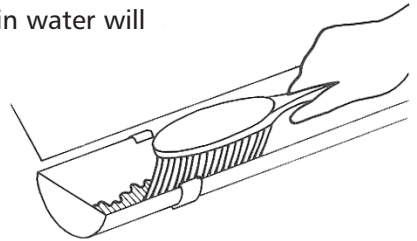
- **Leaking Gutters**

If the gutter or down pipe is leaking the rain water will damage bricks, rot wooden windows and cause damp. It is therefore important that a leak is repaired before it causes expensive damage. Most leaks are caused by one of four problems; they become blocked; they have holes or cracks in them; their joints leak; or they are sagging.

The first thing to do is clean them out. Use a small brush and clean along the gutter.

Cracked or holed guttering can often be repaired provided that the breaks are not too large. You can buy special products which basically cover and fill the holes or cracks.

Joints between lengths of guttering can sometimes leak because the rubber seal is worn or it has dirt underneath. To clean under or to change the seal in plastic guttering, you unclip the gutter. With some types of gutter you buy new seals but with others you replace the joint. If the guttering is sagging or sloping the wrong way the water will not properly flow. To solve this problem you will need to move or buy extra brackets. There are various ways of fixing brackets, so look how the others are done.



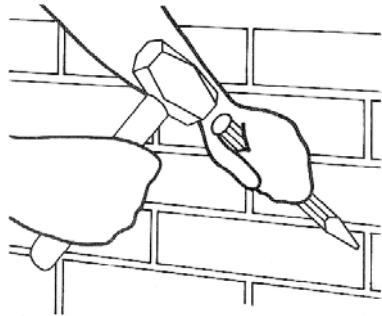
- **Painting**

The windows and doors of your house are normally made of wood. Wood rots and falls apart if it gets wet. Paint stops the water getting into the wood but it does not last forever. So approximately every three years you will have to put more paint on your windows and doors to stop them rotting. You can easily buy all the materials you need to do this. Even employing a painter to do it is much cheaper than repairing rotten windows.

Do not paint wood when it is damp or when it is likely to rain. The best time to paint a house is early or late summer.

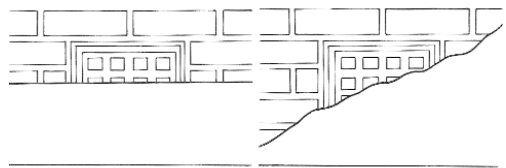
- **Repairing Brick Walls**

Mortar joints hold the bricks together and stop the rain getting in. If they are soft, crumbling, cracked or are badly worn, they need to be repaired to prevent damp and to strengthen the wall.



- **Air Brick**

If you have a wooden floor downstairs it is very important that air is allowed underneath as this helps to stop the wood from rotting. To do this you should have airbricks on the outside walls near to the ground.



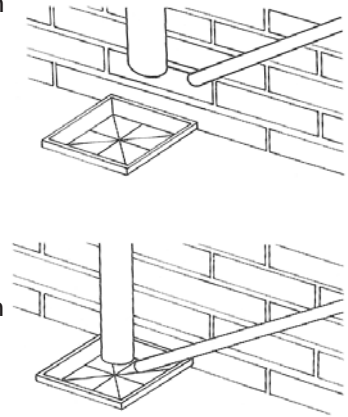
These should not be blocked by paving or earth and must be kept clear.

- **Gullies and Drains**

To carry waste water away underground there are gulleys. If waste pipes do not empty properly into them and spray over the walls or the yard, this may damage the walls and cause damp inside. It is best to extend these pipes so that they pass through the grate and into the gully. To do this,

you can cut holes in a plastic gully grate with a hacksaw.

Always have a grate on top of the gully as it stops leaves and rubbish getting into the drain and blocking it. Once every three months it is a good idea to pick up the grate, clean it, and put three large cups of soda crystals or half a bottle of strong bleach down the gully. Leave it overnight and then rinse by pouring down a bucket of water.

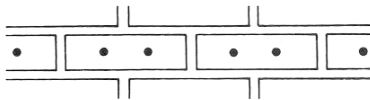


- **Dampness**

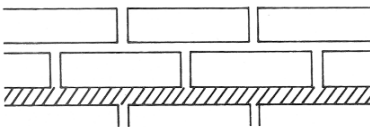
Damp inside your home is unpleasant and may cause expensive dry rot to floors. Solving the problem depends on understanding what has caused it. This can sometimes be easy but other times the advice of a specialist is required. There are four basic types of damp:

Rising Damp

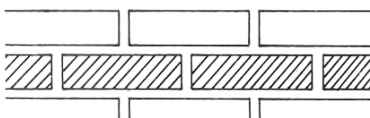
The ground contains water which is sucked up through the fine pores of the bricks and cement mortar. To prevent this from happening a special waterproof layer called a damp proof course (DPC) is installed into the walls. These drawings show the three common types of DPC found in older houses.



Holes that have been drilled into the bricks indicate a chemical DPC.



A thick mortar joint indicates a layer of slate.



Blue bricks are often more waterproof than normal ones.

Rising damp occurs when you have no DPC, or it is broken, or it is not working properly. For example, if soil is piled against the wall the damp can get around the DPC.

The symptoms inside is that the lower part of the wall is damp. There is often staining on the wallpaper and the plaster may become soft or crumbly. Walls between rooms can be affected as well as outside walls.

If you suspect rising damp, first check that the outside ground level is six inches (150mm) below the DPC. A specialist damp proof contractor will normally do a free survey and estimate, but remember that the contractor may be looking for work so get at least two different firms to visit.

Penetrating Damp

This is where water soaks into the house from outside. You will see damp patches on a wall or ceiling where this happens. Use the drawing on page 2 to see if you have any problems which may be causing water to get in. For example , if it is on a ceiling you may have a leaking roof and if it is on a wall you may have a leaking gutter, perished pointing or a leaking overflow pipe.

- **Leaking Pipes**

If you have damp, always check that there are no leaking pipes nearby by feeling if there is water running down them.

- **Condensation**

There is always some moisture in the air even if you cannot see it. If the air gets cold it cannot hold all the moisture and some will appear as tiny droplets of water. This is condensation. You notice it when you see your breath on a cold day, or when the mirror mists over during a bath. Dampness caused by condensation is when this happens on a cold wall or ceiling. Therefore condensation problems occur more in winter, whether it is raining or not. Moist air can travel around the house and condensation often first appears as black mould in corners, near windows, or behind (or inside) cupboards and wardrobes. It is often difficult to deal with

condensation, but there are three basic steps which will help:

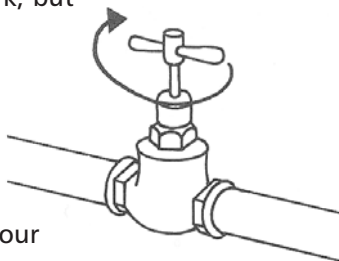
- Make less moisture by keeping lids on cooking pots, drying clothes outside whenever you can, running the cold tap of the bath before the hot, and trying not to use paraffin or bottled gas heaters as they produce a lot of moisture.
- Try to get the moisture out of the house by opening kitchen and bathroom windows as much as possible. It is even better to use an electric extractor fan, particularly if it has a humidity switch. As moisture in air can easily travel around the house, keep all doors particularly the kitchen and bathroom doors closed as much as possible.
- Try to keep the house warmer by insulating, draught proofing, or heating it a little more. It is best to get advice before spending too much money on this.

• **Rotten Wood**

If you find that your floors, skirting boards or other pieces of wood have gone soft, crumbly or rotten it is very important to have it checked as it may be dry rot. This spreads very quickly and therefore soon gets much more expensive. To remedy specialist timber treatment firms will normally do a free survey in the hope of getting the work, but remember to get at least two estimates.

• **Leaking or Burst Water Pipes**

Burst or leaking water pipes can cause a lot of damage and will usually happen when you are not expecting it. So get to know how to turn your water off.

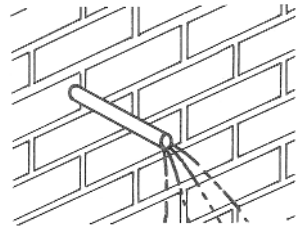


The water pipe usually enters your home in the kitchen, bathroom or front living room where there should be a stop tap. Find this now and try turning it off. This should stop the cold water to the kitchen sink, bath, wash hand basin and toilet.

So if you have a leak in a cold water pipe, turn off the stop tap and empty the pipes by opening all the cold water taps. Also turn off your water heater.

- **Hot Water System**

There should be a separate stop tap next to your hot water tank or multi-point water heater. So if there is a leak in a hot water pipe, turn off the hot water heater, turn off this stop tap and turn on all the hot water taps to empty the pipes.



- **Over Flowing Tanks or Cisterns**

You normally become aware of an overflowing water tank or WC cistern when you see the water pouring out of the overflow pipe. It is important that this is repaired quickly as the water will damage bricks, rot wood and cause damp inside your home.

If you do not know how to do this you should get advice or employ a plumber. It is not an expensive job, but if it is not done it will cause a lot of damage.

Section 3 - Contacting a Builder

Obtaining a good builder can be difficult. Please bear in mind the following points when choosing a builder:

- Don't take the first quote you are offered. Get 2 or 3 to choose from.
- Don't appoint a builder who calls at your home without you asking him to do so.
- Always ask for identification before letting people into your home.
- Ask friends and relatives; they maybe able to recommend firms or people whose work was satisfactory.
- If unsure about a contractor ask for references so you can see the quality of their workmanship.
- Whilst most minor repairs are fairly easy to put right, some works will need to be carried out by a specialist contractor eg. electrical works or gas works. In these instances do ensure that any electrical contractor is registered under the 'approved competent person scheme' and do only use gas contractors that are Corgi registered.
- We have provided a list of builders who have registered their details with the Council who you may wish to contact.
- For further advice or information, you could visit a local DIY store. Many DIY stores provide excellent advice leaflets on how to carry out maintenance/ improvement works.

Depending on the work you need carrying out, assistance may be available from the following:

[Stockton's Home Improvement Agency Service](#)

Stockton's Home Improvement Agency Service (HIA) delivered in partnership with Broadacres Housing Association, provides free impartial and confidential advice on the options available to help elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents keep their independence and ability to live at home.

The HIA will also:-

- Co-ordinate services – by making arrangements, accessing grants and liaising between service providers
- Arrange for minor adaptations to homes to enable people to remain living there
- Provide a Repairs and Improvements service to the over 60's and vulnerable adults who live in their own homes
- Provide 'Handy Person' services by arranging and carrying out minor tasks around the house such as replacing light bulbs, putting up curtains and moving small items of furniture
- Undertake Home Safety Assessments to identify and remedy possible hazards, and advise on accident prevention.

Please contact Broadacres Housing Association on 0845 2008646 for further advice and information.

Warm Front:

A Government funded scheme which provides grants to make homes warmer, healthier and more energy efficient.

Please contact Freephone 0800 3162805 for further advice and information.

Independent Living Project: The Independent Living Project provides a person who can complete minor repairs in and around the home.

Please contact (01642) 919250 for further advice and information.

Energy Savings Advice
Trust Centre:

Access to free or discounted schemes to promote energy efficiency such as loft and cavity wall insulation, new heating systems and in some cases repairs to existing heating systems.

**Please contact Freephone 0800 512012
for further advice and information.**

Private Sector Housing Division

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

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Fax: 01642 526541

Email: privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk

Opening Hours

The office is open from:

8.30am - 5.00pm Monday to Thursday

8.30am - 4.30pm Friday.

To find out more about the services we provide visit us at
www.stockton.gov.uk/homemaintenance

If you would like this information in any other language or
format for example large print or audio please contact
'Private Sector Housing Division' on 01642 527797.

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d'autres langues ou sous un autre format, par
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contacter l'équipe "Private Sector Housing Division" au n° 016 42 527797

FRENCH

نه گهر حهزت لئ به نهم زانباريه به دهستت بکه وئت به
زمانه کانی تر یان به شیوه یه کی تر بؤ نمونه چاپی گه وره/یان
به تیپی تۆمارکراو نکایه په یوه ندى بکه به 'تیمی دایفرستی'
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01642 527797 URDU



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