GUIDANCE ON ALTERATIONS TO HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN NORTH DORSET

DRAFT

October 2007
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Guide is intended to help owners, occupiers and potential purchasers of buildings in North Dorset, and their agents, to understand the Council's approach to works to those structures, of all times and styles, which play an important role in defining the character and appearance of North Dorset and contributing to our understanding of its past. It is complementary to Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: 'Planning and the Historic Environment' (PPG 15), including the technical guidance in Annex C upon which this guide is based and to which the Council will have regard in reaching decisions on applications for listed building consent or works to historic buildings generally.

1.2 North Dorset is a largely rural area containing many picturesque towns and villages and a great diversity of building types. The district is particularly fortunate in having a rich geological heritage resulting in a wide variety of vernacular buildings, reflecting the use of local materials and traditions of construction. Buildings within the district also provide evidence of changes in farming and industrial activity or architectural fashion, particularly during the 18th and 19th century with the best known being the numerous large country houses, churches, farmhouses and barns that reflect the District's connections with its rural and religious heritage. However, all buildings contribute to defining the quality and character of North Dorset providing visual evidence of the organic evolution of our towns, villages and hamlets.

1.3 In recognition of the number of buildings of national importance, the Secretary of State has included approximately 2,500 buildings and structures on the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. In addition the Council has designated 45 conservation areas, the character or appearance of which it seeks to preserve or enhance.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

2.1 This guide is concerned principally with works that affect the special interest and character of buildings, however due to the wide range of building types and materials used for their construction, this guide cannot be comprehensive, but the sections do summarise the characteristics and features that make up the special interest of most buildings and which should be given full weight in the process of judging proposed alterations and extensions. This guide should be considered alongside other matters
- in particular the importance of keeping listed buildings in viable economic use whenever possible. Much of the advice also applies to repairs; however this should not be read as a manual of repair - for which attention is drawn to *The Repair of Historic Buildings: Advice on Principles and Methods* published by English Heritage.

2.2 Most buildings, particularly those of some age, have their own characteristics that are usually related to an original or subsequent function. These should as far as possible be respected when proposals for alterations are put forward. Marks of special interest appropriate to a particular type of building are not restricted to external elements, but may include anything from the orientation, the plan or the arrangement of window openings to small internal fittings.

2.3 The District Council as the Local Planning Authority will attempt to retain the characteristics of distinct types of building, especially those that reflect the vernacular traditions or architectural fashions. The use of appropriate local materials is very desirable in safeguarding or reinforcing local identity and the Council will encourage their production wherever possible.

2.4 It is vitally important that all alterations to buildings should be based on a proper understanding of the structure. Some may suffer from structural defects arising from their age, methods of construction or past use, but can still give adequate service provided they are not subject to major disturbance. Repairs should usually be low-key, re-instating or strengthening the structure only where appropriate; such repairs may sometimes require listed building consent. New work should be fitted to the old to ensure the survival of as much historic fabric as is practical. It is particularly important that old work, both original and subsequent, should not be sacrificed merely to accommodate the new.
2.5 Information about the history and an understanding of the development of a building is essential when considering proposed alterations. This may be gained from the physical evidence in the building itself such as ghosts of lost features in plaster, rough edges where features have been cut away, empty peg-holes and mortices which can elucidate the original form or construction. There may also be documentary information, such as early photographs, drawings, written descriptions, or other documents relating to its construction or use.

2.6 Subsequent additions to buildings, including minor accretions such as conservatories, porches, balconies, verandas, door dressings, bargeboards or chimneys, do not necessarily detract from the quality of a building. For example, farm buildings will often show evidence of modification to reflect changes in farming practice and they are often of interest in their own right as part of the building's organic history. Generally, later features of interest should not be removed merely to restore a building to an earlier form, particularly when there is insufficient evidence to determine the former appearance or plan of the building.

2.7 In general the wholesale reinstatement of lost, destroyed or superseded elements of a building or an interior is not appropriate, although, where a building has largely retained the integrity of its design, the reinstatement of lost or destroyed elements of that design could be considered. In such cases there should always be adequate information confirming the detailed historical authenticity of the work proposed. Speculative reconstruction should be avoided, as should the reinstatement of features that were deliberately superseded by later historic additions.

2.8 Modern extensions should not dominate the existing building in terms of scale, material or situation. There will always be some historic buildings where any extensions would be damaging and should not be permitted. Successful extensions require the application of an intimate knowledge of the building type that is being extended together with a sensitive handling of scale and detail.
3. EXTERNAL ELEVATIONS

Walls

3.1 Walls are the main structural fabric of a building. Alterations to wall surfaces are usually the most damaging that can be made to the overall appearance of a historic building. Alterations or repairs to external elevations should respect the existing fabric and match it in materials, texture, quality and colour. Brick or stonework should not normally be rendered unless the surface was rendered originally. It may be necessary to remove more recently applied render if this is damaging the surface beneath. Every effort should be made to retain or re-use facing brickwork, flintwork, stonework, tile or slate hanging, mathematical tiles or weatherboarding. Cob and other earth walling should be carefully maintained and expert advice should be taken if there is a need for repair.

Late 19th century decorative brickwork adding value and interest to the overall design of the building.
Flint walling is a common feature in North Dorset. It is important to make sure the joints between flints are kept as tight as possible.

Openings

3.2 Door and window openings establish the character of an elevation; they should not generally be altered in their proportions or details, especially where they are a conspicuous element of the design. The depth to which window frames are recessed within a wall is a varying historical feature of importance and greatly affects the character of a building: this too should be respected. Rubbed gauged brick or stone voussoir arches should be kept wherever possible or copied and the original design repeated in any new work or repairs. Historic cill and lintel details should be retained.
3.3 The primary feature of a wall is the building material itself and the pointing should normally be visually subservient to it. There are occasions where decorative pointing is used, such as flint galleting, but in general pointing that speaks louder than the walling material is inappropriate. Repointing should usually be no more than a repair - a repeat of the existing mix and appearance - except where the mix is inappropriate or damaging. Any change in the character of the pointing can be visually and physically damaging and requires consent from the Council when the building is statutory listed.

3.4 It is important to ensure that repointing does not extend beyond the area where it is necessary. Historic pointing may survive wholly or in part and this should be preserved. New work or repair work should integrate with the existing coursing. Tumbled brick or stonework in gables and patterned and polychrome brickwork are particularly important in this context. Cutting out old mortar with mechanical cutters will not be permitted because it makes the joints unacceptably wide, and may score the masonry above perpend joints.
A good example of historic pointing where the natural stone is the dominant material.

An illustration of poor pointing which is visually too dominant and damaging to the appearance of the building. The mortar is also too strong (cement rich) which also leads to degradation of the soft stone.
**Plaster and render**

3.5 Existing plaster should not be stripped off merely to expose rubble, brick or timber framed walls that were never intended to be seen. Refacing of stone, flint, brick or terracotta facades with roughcast, cement render, stick-on stone, Tyrolean render, cement-based paints or other cosmetic treatment that is difficult or impossible to remove should be avoided. This is particularly so where architectural or decorative features would be partially obscured or covered over.

![Cob cottage in Milton Abbas](image)

3.6 Traditional lime-based render is generally preferable to cement-rich render. Cement render forms a waterproof barrier that prevents any moisture trapped within the wall from evaporating and tends to drive damp both higher up and further in. This can lead to the breakdown of the wall surface which will, in time, fall away with the render. Cement render also gives distinctive hard sharp edges to quoins and wall openings. Traditional render based on lime has a softer appearance and allows natural evaporation.

3.7 Some historic renders like stucco and Roman cement were intended to have smooth surfaces and sharp edges in imitation of well cut ashlar stonework. These should not be replaced with other types of render. On late 18th and 19th century stuccoed elevations where there is mock jointing, grooving, rustication or plaster architectural elements like cornices and architraves these should always be retained where possible or carefully copied, never skimmed off. Any new lining out should be matched carefully to the existing.
3.8 Decorative plaster details and plaster features such as pargeting or sgraffito work should not be destroyed. Such features are not always durable and it may be appropriate to reproduce them to complete a decorative scheme. Proper evidence is required for such a scheme of reproduction.

**Timber frames**

3.9 With timber-framed buildings, the totality of the structure has to be taken into consideration; i.e. walls, roof and internal partitions. Repair to timber frames, including roof structures, should be kept to the essential minimum. Traditional fixing and repair methods should be perpetuated. Proper attention should be given to the in-filling panels that are an integral part of any timber-framed building, and also to the surface of the timbers. The original tool marks are often visible, as well as carpenters’ marks, graffiti and smoke-blackening (a particularly important feature in North Dorset). Such features are always destroyed by sand-blasting and sometimes by painting or other cleaning. These methods should be avoided at all costs and the Council will not normally permit works where consent is required (listed buildings).
Timber frames are a common feature in parts of North Dorset

**External painting**

3.10 Painting or re-painting such as a change of colour requires careful consideration to ensure that the interest of a building or area is maintained. When painting a listed building consent is required when it affects the character of a building and advice should be sought from the Council before proceeding with redecoration. Previously unpainted surfaces should not normally be painted over. (An exception to this rule can be made for the sheltercoating of decayed stonework with a limebased mixture.) In many cases the colour of the paint may be less important than the first application of an unsuitable covering which could be damaging to remove. Cement based or other waterproof and hard gloss paints should not be used on surfaces covered with traditional render. The correct finish for traditional renders and plasters is limewash (although much 19th century stucco has traditionally been coated in oil paint). When inappropriate paint has been applied, expert advice should be obtained on suitable methods of removal. Repainting with lead-based paints may be historically correct, but is now restricted to Grade I and II* buildings and the intention to use it on any such building must be notified to English Heritage. Downpipes are usually best painted in unobtrusive colours, but lead downpipes should not normally be painted.
A good example of simple colour choice for an important vernacular cottage

**External cleaning**

3.11 Cleaning a building usually requires listed building consent. This is not only because cleaning can have a marked effect on the character of buildings, but also because cleaning processes can affect the historic fabric. The cleaning of a building within a homogeneous terrace would obviously affect the appearance of the terrace as a whole. All cleaning methods can cause damage if carelessly handled. Cleaning with water and bristle brushes is the simplest method, although water cleaning can lead to saturation of the walls and outbreaks of rot in timbers. Other methods including abrasive and chemical cleaning can damage wall surfaces and destroy detail. The Council will need to be satisfied that cleaning is both necessary and worthwhile to remove corrosive dirt or to bring a major improvement in appearance, and should ensure that cleaning is carried out by specialist firms and under close supervision. Areas not being cleaned should be protected.
Wrought and cast iron

3.12 The character of wrought iron fittings, railings, lamp-brackets etc is derived from the unique qualities of the material and from traditional smithing techniques. Since wrought iron is now difficult to obtain, old ironwork should be retained wherever possible. It is not possible to copy satisfactorily the character of wrought iron using mild steel. Old cast iron features, including railings, balconies, windows, fire-grates, door furniture and structural beams and columns can be visually and architecturally important. Such features may carry the name of the foundry and the date of casting, thereby adding to the historic interest of the building. Broken cast iron can be repaired and damage should not be regarded as an excuse for removal.

Two good examples of decorative ironwork in Shaftesbury both of which contribute to the character and appearance of the area.
Parapets and other features

3.13 Parapets (solid or balustraded), pediments, parapeted or coped gables and saddlestones, eaves, cornices and moulded cappings are essential terminal features in the articulation of an elevation. If they have to be replaced, it should be in facsimile and in the same materials.
Decorative parapets can add greatly to the quality of historic buildings

Porches

3.14 Porches are sometimes the dominant feature of an elevation; their detailing should always be respected. Open columned porches of the Classical type should not normally be enclosed (eg. with glazed sides and doors to the front), but should be left open. In those instances where new porches are considered acceptable, their design should be undemonstrative and should not challenge the integrity of the facade.
A fine 18th century door hood.

A simple and appropriate porch on a vernacular building.
Balconies and verandas

3.15 Balconies and verandas are very often formal components in the design of an elevation. They should be maintained and repaired; and if they have to be replaced, facsimiles should be erected using matching materials. As with porches they should not normally be enclosed with glazing.

Fire escapes

3.16 Fire escapes can be very damaging to the external appearance of a building. If an escape is essential it should be inconspicuously located and fixed in such a way as to avoid rust or other staining of the wall surfaces. In many cases there may be alternative ways of ensuring adequate fire protection and means of escape that would require less physical alteration.

External plumbing

3.17 External plumbing should be kept to a minimum and should not disturb or break through any mouldings or decorative features. A change from cast iron or lead downpipes to materials such as plastic or extruded aluminium sometimes requires listed building consent and will not normally be allowed.

Inscriptions and other features

3.18 Inscriptions, old lettering, old shop signs, inn sign boards, date plaques and stones, coats of arms, monograms, fire insurance plaques, commemorative or symbolic carvings and statues in niches are part of the history of a building. These features should be retained in situ wherever possible. If works require the temporary removal of an interesting feature, it should be put back in its former position. New signs and advertisements on listed buildings will require listed building consent. They should be carefully designed and positioned with appropriate fixings that will not damage the building.

Carved details

3.19 Carved and other sculptural details such as moulded brickwork and terracotta are an important part of the design and character of buildings that carry them. Where such details are decaying, it is important to record them.
A well conceived and designed stone porch

**ROOFS**

3.20 The roof is nearly always a dominant feature of a building and the retention of its original structure, shape, pitch, cladding and ornament is important.

Roof coverings are a vitally important component in defining special interest
3.21 The Council will encourage the retention and development of sources of traditional roofing materials. The cannibalising of other buildings for traditional materials will be discouraged. When a roof is stripped it is important that as much as possible of the original covering is re-used, preferably on the visible slopes, with matching new materials on other slopes.

Thatch

3.22 North Dorset thatch reflects the County style which is distinct from that of other regions. Typically a Dorset thatched roof had a flush ridge and little or no ornamentation. Archaeological evidence suggests that thatching has been used in Dorset for over 2500 years. It is the most striking truly vernacular material still in use. Over the whole of this period, until the last 40 years, the material used to thatch buildings was of local origin. Recently however imports of water reed are being used instead of the produce of local farmers. The change in material produces changes in appearance, especially when the techniques used to thatch come from other counties whose traditions involve water reed rather than straw thatches. The pattern and form of ridges, eaves, verges and dormers, and the profile of the roof all contribute to the style of the roof.

3.23 Longstraw thatch was once perhaps the most widely used material. This name describes a technique in which the stems of wheat face both up and down the roof. The other main technique using combed wheat reed was generally found in the Blackmoor Vale and on the western side of the County but is now also seen throughout the County. In this technique the ears are kept together at the top of the bundles or yealms, and the bottom or butts form the external surface of the roof. Whilst wheat was a main material other cereals were also used with these techniques.

3.24 The normal practice of thatching in Dorset is to recoat the roof. This means that a roof builds up a series of layers of material which increase its insulation value but may also protect a valuable heritage. In a number of cases medieval buildings still have smoke blackened thatch or smoke blackened wattle work on the underside of the roof. Wattle work is a woven basket-like lining usually made with hazel or willow cut from a coppice. This smoke blackening preserves the original materials. This results in roofs which contain botanical samples of great importance. Smoke blackened thatch should be retained in situ. Such samples are not just found in the county's oldest buildings. Some eighteenth century cottages have every layer intact spanning over 200 years. These are often laid on pole rafter roofs which are themselves a testament to the skill of former craftsmen. Losses of important botanical samples and of interesting and significant forms of construction have occurred because we have not been fully aware of their intrinsic and relative value.
A typical Dorset thatched roof with flush rather than block ridge.

**Slates and tiles**

3.25 Some slates and all stone slates are laid to diminishing courses. The character of such roof coverings should not be damaged by a radical change in the range of slate sizes. The pattern and coursing of different roofing materials are distinguishing features of different building types and areas of the country. The patterning and coursing characteristic to North Dorset should be retained and, where necessary, restored with matching materials.

Stone slates in on a roof in Stalbridge. Their use creates a very different appearance to clay tiles or welsh slate.
Lead and copper

3.26 Both lead and copper are traditional roof coverings and should not normally be replaced by modern substitute materials. Details such as lead rolls, hips and ridges are important visual elements. Any dates or inscriptions in the lead should be preserved.

Embellishments to roofs

3.27 Towers, turrets, spires, bellcotes and cupolas are not only part of the overall design or indeed sometimes its main feature, but frequently make an important contribution to the townscape or landscape. This is particularly so with public buildings and churches. Lesser decorative embellishments such as ridge and cresting tiles, iron cresting, finials, gargoyles and spouts, bargeboards, valences, cartouches and statues should also be preserved.

Dormers and rooflights

3.28 Early dormers, especially of the 17th or 18th century pedimented type, should be retained and carefully repaired. If beyond repair they should be reconstructed with all details reproduced. Enlargement of existing dormers on principal elevations should normally be avoided.

3.29 Any decision as to whether new dormers or rooflights can be added to a roof must be approached carefully. Historic roof structures must not be damaged by their insertion. New dormers should not upset a symmetrical design of either an individual building or a terrace.
3.30 Where new dormers would be inappropriate to the type of building or proposed position, new rooflights, preferably in flush fittings, may be acceptable, but not on prominent roof slopes.

**Chimney stacks and pots**

3.31 Chimney stacks are both formal and functional features of the roofscape and can be important indicators of the date of a building and of the internal planning. In many cases chimneys also perform a vital structural function, and they should normally be retained, even when no longer required. There may, however, be poorly built and positioned later additions that can be removed with advantage. Chimney pots can sometimes be valuable decorative features in their own right, but they are also functional features: plain Georgian and 19th century pots are often important as part of a traditional roofscape which will be damaged if they are removed.
Doors and doorways

3.32 Original doorways and any surviving original doors should be retained. Their replacement or defacement is often entirely unnecessary. Domestic and public building door types vary widely and if they have to be replaced their design should be appropriate to the character of the building. Replacement doors should copy the original in the materials, the detail of the design, and the paint finish. Modern off-the peg doors are not generally acceptable for use in listed buildings, nor are doors with incongruous design features such as integral fanlights. Unpainted hardwood or stained or varnished softwood doors are rarely suitable.
3.33 Doorways that become redundant should in general not be removed. This is particularly the case where a terrace of houses is converted into flats or offices and some of the doors are no longer required: it is most important that they are retained for the sake of the overall design of the terrace.

**Door detail**

3.34 Doorcases, door furniture including hinges, knockers and letter-boxes, foot scrapers, fanlights, pediments, columns, pilasters, cornices, consoles and carved or stucco moulded details should not be removed or mutilated but retained even if the doorway is redundant.
A fine 19th century fanlight in Shaftesbury

WINDOWS

3.35 As a rule, windows in historic buildings should be repaired, or if beyond repair should be replaced 'like for like'. If listed building consent is given for additional windows it is important that their design, scale and proportion should be sympathetic to the character of the building.
A 17th century window with leaded lights

3.36 Within the broad window types such as sash or casement there is a wide variation of detail according to date, function and region. Standardisation to one pattern - such as the many new 'Georgian' sashes which adopt early 19th century details - should be avoided. The thickness and moulding of glazing bars, the size and arrangement of panes and other details should be appropriate to the date of the building or to the date when the window aperture was made.
Windows provide important visual evidence of a particular phase of building construction or social status of a building or part of a building. The presumption should be in favour of repair and retention rather than wholesale replacement.

3.37 If a building has been re-windowed there may be a desire to return to the original glazing pattern. In general the existing windows should be retained, unless they are obviously inappropriate or in very poor condition. There may be some cases, particularly in uniform urban terraces, where a return to earlier glazing patterns following a specific local pattern is appropriate.

3.38 Window types vary according to the region and its building tradition. Mullioned and transomed casement windows continued into the 18th century in some areas.

3.39 Leaded and other metal-framed casements in 19th century and particularly earlier buildings are an increasing rarity and should be repaired or re-leaded rather than replaced.
3.40 Eighteenth and 19th century fancy glazing bars in geometric Gothic or marginal patterns should be retained wherever possible or copied, whether they are original to the building or later additions.

3.41 Twentieth century mild steel windows were often a design feature of Modern Movement and Art Deco buildings. These should be repaired, or replaced like for like if beyond repair.

3.42 Paint is usually the correct finish for timber windows; staining is not a traditional finish and should not normally be used. However, early windows of oak were commonly limewashed or left unpainted and these should not now be painted but left to weather naturally.

Old glass

3.43 All old glass is of interest, whether it be stained, painted or etched glass or early plain glass such as crown glass. Great care should be taken to protect old glass during building works. If it is necessary to remove panes to repair the window frames or infrastructure they should be reset. Where external protection for glass is required, it should be reversible and as unobtrusive as possible.
Replacement windows

3.44 The insertion of factory made standard windows of all kinds, whether in timber, aluminium, galvanised steel or plastic is almost always damaging to the character and appearance of historic buildings. In particular, for reasons of strength the thickness of frame members tends to be greater in plastic or aluminium windows than in traditional timber ones. Modern casements with top-opening or louvred lights or asymmetrically spaced lights are generally unsuitable as replacements for windows in historic buildings. Such alterations should not be allowed. Architects’ drawings and specifications should make clear the manner in which new windows are intended to open.
3.45 It is usually impossible to install double-glazed units in existing frames or to replicate existing frames with new sealed units without making noticeable changes to the profiles of glazing bars, styles, and rails. The new glass in such units may also significantly alter the appearance of the window. Such changes are rarely acceptable in listed buildings. Weather stripping and draught proofing are visually more innocuous changes as well as thermally efficient and cost-effective. Secondary glazing in a removable inner frame is another acceptable option for some windows.

3.46 Old louvred and panelled external shutters are important features and often contribute to the design of an elevation. Blind-cases and canopies should also be preserved.

4. SHOP FRONTS

4.1 Wherever shop fronts of merit survive they should be retained. Early 20th century shop fronts such as those with Art Nouveau or early Art Deco details can be as unusual as 18th or 19th century examples. Features of value such as blinds in blind boxes, shutters in shutter boxes against an upright and stall-risers are often concealed beneath later facings. Premises where works to shop fronts are proposed should always be inspected and the possible survival of old features checked.
4.2 There are many examples of first floor display windows, and infrequent examples of second floor ones. These date from the late 19th and early 20th century and give a characteristic appearance which should be preserved. Proposals to remove a modern shopfront to restore an elevation to its previous designed appearance matching the rest of a terrace can usually be encouraged, but should be viewed with caution in cases where the shop front is of interest in itself.

**Shop blinds and security grilles**

4.3 Retractable apron blinds covered in canvas are often characteristic features of historic Shopfronts and should be retained. Modern plastic canopies are not acceptable.

4.4 External steel roller shutters are not suitable for historic shopfronts. Traditional timber shutters give reasonable protection: laminated glass and internal chain-link screens are modern alternatives. Traditional stallrisers are an effective deterrent to 'ram-raiders', as are small shop windows between masonry piers.
New shop fronts

4.5 New shop fronts should be designed in sympathy with the rest of the elevation and incorporate any ground floor details of interest. Large inserted plate-glass shop fronts without any visual support for the upper part of the premises can have an unfortunate effect, and shop fronts should not extend into the storey above or alter the proportion of first floor windows. Modern materials such as plastics are to be avoided as facings. The fascia board should not be out of scale with the building as a whole and should usually be finished at the top with console brackets and a cornice or other capping. Not only is this the traditional treatment for shop fronts but the cornice provides an architectural division between the modern shop front and the older upper floors.

4.6 Depending on the nature of a proposed commercial or office use, it is very often unnecessary to provide display windows and thus alter an intact ground floor. Existing openings should be retained wherever possible, and if alteration is necessary it should only be to the minimum extent required. Standard corporate shop fronts are seldom appropriate for historic buildings, nor are internally illuminated fascia boxes or signs. The prestige value of listed building premises and their distinctive detailing can be emphasised instead.

5. INTERIORS

5.1 The plan of a building is one of its most important characteristics. Interior plans and individual features of interest should be respected and left unaltered as far as possible. Internal spaces, staircases, panelling, window shutters, doors and doorcases, mouldings, decorated ceilings, stucco-work, and wall-decorations are part of the special interest of a building and may be its most valuable feature.
Sometimes the more humble features can provide vitally important links with our cultural heritage and should be retained.

A good 18th century shelved cupboard
Walls

5.2 Internal walls in old buildings should always be investigated with care in advance of alterations in case ancient or interesting features are hidden in the plaster or behind the panelling or other covering. In many cases the partitions themselves are of historic interest. New partitions should be kept to a minimum. They should not cut through mouldings or enriched plaster decoration but be shaped around them to allow for reinstatement at a later date.

Plasterwork

5.3 All old plain plasterwork should be preserved where possible. Traditional lime and hair plaster has good insulation qualities and is better able to tolerate condensation than modern gypsum plaster. Care should always be taken with works to old plaster, especially when chasing-in electrical wiring, in case there is early decoration. All decorative features from a simple cornice or cove to elaborate wall and ceiling decoration should be preserved.

Chimneypieces (including fireplaces) and chimneybreasts

5.4 Good chimneypieces are part of the decorative history of a building and are often central to the design of a room. There is no excuse for their removal if this is simply because a chimney is redundant. In the rare cases where there is no alternative to the removal of a chimneypiece, it should be saved for use in another position and should not be removed from the building.
5.5 The removal of a later chimneypiece of interest should not normally be allowed even if an earlier open hearth is known to survive behind it. The removal of a chimneybreast is almost never acceptable, not least because it may affect the structural stability of the building.
Staircases

5.6 The removal or alteration of any historic staircase is not normally acceptable. The stair is often the most considerable piece of design within a building and can be important dating evidence. In retail premises, the removal of the lowest flight of stairs - which will preclude access to and use of upper floors - should not be allowed.
A simple 18th century staircase in a vernacular cottage
A careful choice of both type and colour of paints or wallpapers can make a significant contribution to the appearance and integrity of a historic interior. Inappropriate schemes may, conversely, be visually damaging. In some instances specialist advice should be sought on the original scheme of decoration which may survive beneath later layers. Although strict adherence to historical forms is not normally a requirement in buildings whose interiors are of a ‘private’ rather than a ‘museum’ character, the use of historically appropriate decoration can greatly enhance most listed buildings. Where important early schemes of interior decoration survive, cleaning and conservation rather than renewal may be appropriate. Overpainting, even of deteriorated or discoloured areas of plain colour, may damage or obscure the historical record.
FLOORS

Floor surfaces

5.8 Floor surfaces are too often disregarded when buildings are refurbished. It is not only marble floors that are important: all types of paving such as stone flags, and pitched cobbles, old brick floors, early concrete, lime ash, and plaster floors, should be respected.

A simple but important tiled floor in a vernacular cottage.

5.9 This also applies to old boarded floors, especially those with early wide oak or elm boards. All such features should normally be repaired and re-used. When new floorboards are needed, they should be of the same timber, width and thickness as those they are replacing.
5.10 Great care should be taken when lifting old boards for the installation or repair of services, especially where the boards are tongued or dowelled. The cutting of joists for new services should be kept to a minimum, and any early sound-deadening or fire-proofing between the joists should be preserved.
Floor strengthening

5.11 Proposals for floor strengthening often form part of refurbishment schemes, and may be dictated by the inflexible requirements of particular clients or funding bodies, demanding the same standards as those applied to new buildings. These are almost always at variance with the architectural and structural integrity of a historic building and should not normally be regarded as a sufficient justification for major alterations. The floors of most historic buildings can be made perfectly adequate for the actual loads they will carry.

5.12 Low-key techniques of stiffening existing floors, or limited strengthening, may often be possible, provided there is minimum disturbance to the overall structural equilibrium, thereby retaining as much existing fabric and structure as possible, as well as, where necessary, improving performance. Repairs should usually be carried out using traditional materials and methods, such as scarfing on new timber. Where more modern techniques are put forward, applicants will need to show good reason why these are being proposed.

5.13 Often the pressure for floor strengthening and replacement arises from the presence of dry rot within the structural members. Dry rot eradication can rapidly lead to the progressive stripping and dismantling of a building. In every case where remedial works are proposed, the minimum works necessary should be carried out after detailed discussion. The use of new techniques requiring the minimum removal of timber should be encouraged.

6. MINOR ADDITIONS AND NEW SERVICES

Minor additions to listed buildings

6.1 There are some standard external fixtures that require listed building consent when they affect the character of a listed building. These include satellite dishes, meter boxes, burglar alarms, security and other floodlighting, video cameras, and central heating and other flues, both standard and balanced. Only undamaging and visually unobtrusive positions for such fixtures should be agreed.
Introduction of services to listed buildings

6.2 The poorly thought out introduction of services, such as mains electricity, telephone or gas, can be detrimental to the structure, appearance and character of a building. Long runs of surface wiring and any external gas piping should be avoided unless chasing-in would destroy historic fabric. The introduction of new services to historic interiors must also be handled with care, and any false floors or ceilings for concealing services, computer trunking, fibre optics, central heating etc, should be reversible, and not entail alterations to other features such as doors or skirtings.