

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

**SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE:**

# **DESIGN IN TOWN CENTRES**

March 2011

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) aims to ensure that the care of heritage buildings enables conservation to play an active part in regeneration. This can be achieved by ensuring that change is managed in a way that sustains and enhances the historic character of the built environment, without overly constraining or inhibiting development.
- 1.2 This SPG provides guidance for:
- Owners/ occupiers of town centre heritage properties within Rhondda Cynon Taf who are considering alterations and repairs to their buildings;
  - For the Council when providing assistance to owners/ occupiers and when considering planning applications.
- 1.3 Heritage buildings include all properties built before the First World War and notable buildings of architectural and group value built before the Second World War. Of particular importance are listed buildings, properties in designated conservation areas, and those which contribute to the overall townscape quality.
- 1.4 This document provides guidance for town centre buildings throughout the County Borough, including advice on improvements and repairs as well as new build and demolitions, to ensure that such works meet the required standards for each area. It sets out design principles but does not seek to dictate design solutions. The three main town centres of Aberdare, Llantrisant and Pontypridd, provide the focus for this SPG. The issues, principles and recommendations identified also apply to other town centres within the County Borough which share similar characteristics.
- 1.5 This SPG aims to provide those considering works that involve heritage buildings or sites within town centres with guidance on maintenance, repair and the design of alterations and / or new buildings. It offers guidance on the reinstatement and repair of original features using traditional materials and methods, as well as broader guidance on the principles of good townscape and urban design.
- 1.6 Maintenance is essential as it will usually limit the need for costly repairs and replacements. More detailed assistance on particular building elements can be found from a variety of sources, but the concern of this document is to emphasise the importance of early and appropriate action.
- 1.7 When repairs, replacements and additions to heritage buildings are being proposed, this document

emphasises the necessity for consideration of the context, the setting and the history of the building. The use of old photographs can sometimes suggest appropriate designs. Particular decisions will need to be based on the circumstances of each property. Owners/ occupiers are encouraged to discuss any proposed changes with Council Development Control, Conservation and Building Control Officers.

- 1.8 The SPG is intended as guidance and not a specification of works. The SPG is not exhaustive and the examples given should not be adopted indiscriminately for any particular building. It does not offer advice on structural defects and issues, for which appropriate professional assistance should be sought.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1 This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is an accompanying document to the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan (LDP). The LDP, as the statutory Development Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough, contains the policies necessary to guide development in the County Borough until 2021.
- 2.2 This SPG offers guidance in respect of design in town centres and is a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications. The

LDP policies that relate to such proposals are as follows:

### Policy AW 5 – New Development

Development proposals will be supported where:-

#### 1. Amenity

- a) The scale, form and design of the development would have no unacceptable effect on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area;
- b) Where appropriate, existing site features of built and natural environment value would be retained;
- c) There would be no significant impact upon the amenities of neighbouring occupiers;
- d) The development would be compatible with other uses in the locality;
- e) The development would include the use of multi-functional buildings where appropriate;
- f) The development designs out the opportunity for crime and anti social behaviour.

## 2. Accessibility

- a) The development would be accessible to the local and wider community by a range of sustainable modes of transport;
- b) The site layout and mix of uses maximises opportunities to reduce dependence on cars;
- c) The development would have safe access to the highway network and would not cause traffic congestion or exacerbate existing traffic congestion;
- d) Car parking would be provided in accordance with the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance on Access, Parking and Circulation.

### **Policy AW 7 – Protection and Enhancement of the Built Environment**

Development proposals which impact upon sites of architectural and / or historical merit and sites of archaeological importance will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the site.

Development proposals which affect areas of public open space, allotments, public rights of way, bridleways and cycle tracks will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that :-

1. There is a surplus of such facilities in the locality, or;
2. The loss can be replaced with an equivalent or greater provision in the immediate locality; or
3. The development enhances the existing facility.

2.3 This guidance should be read in conjunction with other SPGs published by the Council:

- Nature Conservation
- The Historic Built Environment
- Affordable Housing
- Planning Obligations
- Access, Circulation and Parking
- A Design Guide for Householder Development
- Delivering Design and Placemaking

## 3. Issues

3.1 The preservation and enhancement of the heritage buildings within Rhondda Cynon Taf depends on the standard of the following:

1. Maintenance;
2. Repair and replacement;
3. Alterations;

4. The quality of new buildings;
5. Public Realm Improvements.
- 3.2 Actions 1 to 3 are primarily about preservation, though sometimes with an element of enhancement. Lost features of heritage value may be restored using proven techniques and works which have a negative effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area removed.
- 3.3 New buildings should enhance the area, perhaps via the development of a poor quality site or the replacement of a building that has a negative impact.
- 3.4 The key to the effective conservation of the built environment is understanding it and the impact of any changes. Works should not be carried out without establishing:
- Why they are necessary;
  - What they are trying to achieve; and
  - Whether or not they might have any adverse consequences.
- 3.5 This involves assessing each site in terms of its contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, its historic value, form of construction and technical performance, including the presence of defects or any other threats to the survival of its fabric. Expert advice should be sought on all major projects, preferably from an architect, building surveyor or planner who is experienced in working with historic environments.
- 3.6 Even the simplest of operations should be based on an understanding of how a particular building ‘works’, in itself and in relation to its setting. Any work to larger buildings and buildings of exceptional historic value should be based on a comprehensively researched conservation plan.
- 3.7 The historic characterisation of each centre should be taken into account when considering any change of development that could affect the local heritage. The significant town centres within the County Borough are Aberdare, Llantrisant and Pontypridd, but the guidance also applies to development and conservation within all the smaller key centres which include Ferndale, Hirwaun, Llanharan, Mountain Ash, Porth, Tonypany, Tonyrefail and Treorchy.
- 3.8 The three significant town centres have designated conservation areas (Pontypridd has two). As these conservation areas were predominantly developed during different periods – Llantrisant in the late C18, Aberdare in the mid C19, and Pontypridd in the later

C19, they provide a range of design solutions to be considered. A summary of each of these key centres is as follows:

### 3.9 **Aberdare**

The Aberdare Conservation Area boundary surrounds the historic Victorian commercial core of the town and only includes a few buildings in sole residential use. Aberdare grew rapidly in the Victorian era during the rapid expansion of the iron ore and coal industries. Many of the town centre buildings were constructed during a 20 year period after 1845 with a further significant expansion over the next 30 years. The Valley town has retained much of its Victorian form and built fabric with a mixture of terraces including early Victorian shops, elegant mid-Victorian buildings and a number of dominant buildings within the street scene - e.g. The Black Lion Hotel. Though the buildings are predominantly rendered, there are numerous fine examples of brick frontages and the occasional use of stone. Together this enlivens the visual character of the town centre. A high percentage of the historic buildings have survived in their original form, and 33 are listed.



**Commercial Street**

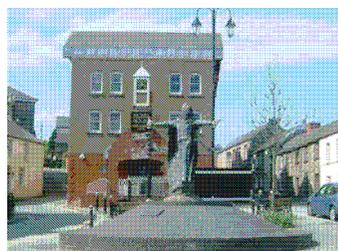
### 3.10 **Llantrisant**

Llantrisant Conservation Area incorporates the oldest areas of the town, the newer residential expansion and the surrounding open space including Llantrisant Common. This SPG applies to the historic town centre. Being mainly built in stone before the other centres were developed, Llantrisant has unique townscapes. The built character of Llantrisant reflects both its topographical setting on a hill-top saddle, and the phases of its development. The locations of the church and castle remain from pre-Norman times with the historic town following the mediaeval road and track layout. The majority of the simple residential and commercial buildings that cluster around the higher land were mainly in place in the early and mid nineteenth century. Some notable buildings were added in the late nineteenth century but the next significant expansion came after the World Wars with

residential estates built outwards from the historic core. The central and oldest area of the town, clustering around the higher land with the church and castle, has retained the great majority of its original 18th and 19th Century stock of buildings, and there are few contemporary infill or replacement buildings. The consistency of the stone and rendered buildings with slate roofs creates much of its charm.

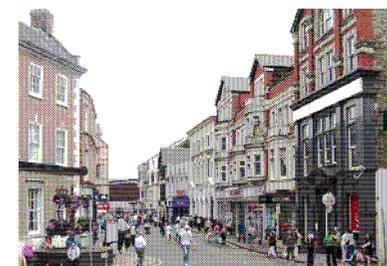


**High Street**



**The Bull Ring**

some fine examples from earlier years. Though a wide range of building forms and materials were used as some owners sought distinctive designs, many of the historic buildings in the Conservation Areas are decorated with fine stonework and constructed from local quarried stone – a distinctive blue pennant. The town centre includes notable public buildings but it is the variety of commercial and residential properties that defines the qualities of the Conservation Areas, particularly the three and four-storey commercial buildings which introduce a wide variety of late Victorian decoration.



**Taff Street**

**3.11 Pontypridd**

Pontypridd, a gateway to the Valleys, developed as an industrial centre after the arrival of the canal and later, the Taff Vale railway. Through most of the C19, the combination of iron and steel works and coal mining gradually established Pontypridd as an successful industrial and market town. However, it was the phenomenal growth of deep-seam coal mining in the last twenty years of the century that saw the population increase from 8,000 to 20,000. The historic townscapes of the Conservation Areas developed in this period with

3.12 Aberdare is typically three storeys in scale with simple, unified terraces of buildings, sometimes enhanced with projecting bays on the upper floors. Pontypridd, has a greater profusion of architectural styles with larger, four storey buildings incorporating Victorian detailing and ornamentation. The smaller overall scale and size of Llantrisant is reflected in its buildings, more typically

two storey terraces with minimal decoration or enhancement.

### 3.13 **Maintenance**

Regular maintenance of a building is the best and most economic way of conserving its fabric. Looking after a building is the responsibility of owners and occupiers. A building that is looked after will retain its value and the need for extensive repairs will be avoided. Protection from water and damp penetration is the most important issue. Roofs, gutters and down pipes should be the first to be repaired. Owners of large buildings might consider creating a maintenance plan based on annual visual inspections and a detailed survey every five years.

More general day-to-day maintenance does not normally require any formal planning consent from the Council, but a list of tasks that owners/ occupiers should ensure are carried out on a regular basis is given in Appendix 1.

### 3.14 **Repair, Reinstatement and Improvement**

Correct '**repair**' should comprise the use of traditional materials, methods and appropriate detailing, e.g. re-roofing in natural slate, re-pointing in matching mortar and to exact detailing, replacement of damaged brickwork and stone to match the original materials, restoration of historic shop fronts, reinstating original

facing materials, i.e. taking down, inappropriate paint, render etc.

'**Reinstatement**' of lost architectural features known to have existed on a particular building, should use authentic details and traditional materials, e.g. replacement of missing or shortened chimney stacks, gables and oriel windows, installation of windows in the original (usually timber) material and to the original pattern, reinstatement of original shop fronts, which can often be modelled from old photographs, reprovision of boundary walls and railings where they have been removed.

'**Improvement**' means the enhancement of a building by the removal of inappropriate features and their replacement based on traditional principles, although without necessarily 'copying' the original design. This might apply to the following examples- shopfronts, glazing and doors, gutters and down pipes.

- 3.15 Regular maintenance should minimise the need for major repairs to all buildings. However, some elements will eventually reach the end of their life, in which case consideration will have to be given to replacing using traditional materials and proven techniques of repair. The alternative is the loss of the historic value of individual buildings and the gradual erosion of the special interest of the conservation area. The purpose of the repair of any buildings within the conservation

area is to prevent, or at least slow, the process of decay without damaging or altering features which contribute to its historic / architectural importance.

- 3.16 The following principles of repair provide a good starting point from which to understand the approach and philosophy to historic building repair:

**Minimise Intervention:** Interventions should be kept to the minimum necessary to ensure long-term survival.

**Avoid unnecessary damage:** The authenticity of an historic building depends on the integrity of its fabric. Replacement of historic fabric, no matter how carefully done, will affect the appearance of a building, reduce its value as a source of historical information and erode local distinctiveness.

**Analyse the cause of defects:** To repair or replace decayed fabric without having understood why it needs replacement is likely to invite further problems.

**Let the building 'breathe':** Most modern buildings are made of hard, strong and impervious materials. They rely on physical barriers such as damp proof courses and membranes, cavity walls and cladding to exclude moisture. Historic and traditional buildings are quite different. Many have solid walls and most have a porous fabric that absorbs moisture, which then needs to evaporate i.e. to 'breathe'. To repair such buildings

with hard, impervious materials will cause damage to fabric that may have survived for hundreds of years.

- 3.17 It is particularly important that only high quality materials are used using proven techniques. Cheap, modern materials such as plastic might be perceived to offer advantages in the short term, but the long term future of the character and appearance of the area will be compromised. Traditional materials which will 'weather' into their setting are required. The extent of repair, reinstatement and improvement works required to a property should always be assessed within the context of the whole building and not on a vertical unit or shop front basis
- 3.18 Appendix 2 lists essential minor repairs. It should be noted that listed building consent may be required for these and in some cases planning permission may be required. Advice should be sought from the Council where necessary.

## 4. Planning Considerations & Requirements

- 4.1 The guidance in this document will be used to inform planning decisions in the town centres of the County Borough.

- 4.2 An important consideration will be the requirement for planning permission, or other planning consents. In conservation areas there are increased planning controls over a range of development situations from minor works to the need for conservation area consent for demolition. The Council also has the power to impose Article 4 Directions related to specific issues, which further reduce the available permitted development rights, and such Directions are currently in force in the Aberdare Conservation Area. Advice should always be sought from the Council regarding the need for consent before starting any works.
- 4.3 Generally, consent will not be granted for works that would result in a loss of architectural or heritage features or character that contribute to the special interest of a town centre, particularly if they are taking place within a designated conservation area. This includes not only windows, doors, chimneys, rainwater goods, materials, shop fronts and other architectural components, but also historic plot boundaries, spatial characteristics and key views and vistas.
- 4.4 Planning decisions will seek to ensure that development will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a **conservation area**.
- 4.5 Demolition is controlled in conservation areas, and conservation area consent is often required for demolition works. The presumption is for preservation of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Demolition will only be permitted for buildings which do not contribute positively to the area and where proposals for the future use of those sites have been submitted and approved.
- 4.6 In addition to formal planning permission, **listed building** consent will be required for works that affect the character or appearance of a listed building. This usually includes work to the interior as well as the exterior, and to any structures within the curtilage of the building.
- 4.7 Planning decisions will seek to protect listed buildings and their settings from inappropriate development (including extensions, alterations and works to the interior of the building) in order to ensure their character and appearance is preserved. Any development proposals that are likely to affect the setting of a listed building must be sensitive to its scale, design, materials and layout. Care will therefore need to be taken to ensure that development proposals relating to listed buildings are architecturally sensitive and respect the historic value of the building.
- 4.8 The demolition of listed buildings will be resisted unless it can be clearly shown that every effort has been made to preserve the building and it is beyond economic repair.

- 4.9 Works affecting **trees** protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) require formal consent, and works to trees within conservation areas require a period of notification to the Council. Before carrying out works which may affect trees, advice should be sought as to whether a tree is within a conservation area, or whether it is protected under a Tree Preservation Order.
- 4.10 New **advertisements and signage** may require advertisement consent and they should respect their area in terms of visual and neighbour amenity, and public and highway safety.
- 4.11 This document emphasises the importance of the quality of design including form and materials, the need to respect the setting, the requirements for heritage buildings and the need for adequate maintenance.
- 4.12 To achieve these aims, owners/ occupiers considering development or changes to their buildings are encouraged to seek pre-application advice by discussing proposals with the Council's Regeneration and Planning Service before submitting applications. In this way any specific issues or requirements can be addressed before plans are formally received. It is also recommended that prior to the submission of any proposals, discussions should be held regarding requirements under the Building Regulations.

4.13 Such discussions at an early stage are important to ensure the implications of development in the proposed location are fully understood. Further points of advice are listed below (Further Reading & Useful Contacts).

4.14 Advice is given below in respect of specific works:

4.14.1 **Roofscape**

The roofscape of an urban area forms the skyline and visual profile of a streetscape and is a significant part of its identity. The combination of materials, details, form and massing creates the 'hat', which sits above the building and is critical to its character. Although much of the detail may not always be visible from street level, the topography of Valleys towns allows views across and over the roofscape from many different parts of the area. The consistency and uniformity of the original roofscape of the towns, has been lost through the use of alternative materials and the loss of chimney stacks and pots, the impact and significance of which can be appreciated where original examples are retained.



The topography of the Rhondda Cynon Taf area means that views across the roofline of urban areas are particularly prominent, as evident at Llantrisant (top right) and Aberdare (bottom). The decorative Victorian architecture of Pontypridd offers a varied and interesting skyline (top left).

- 4.14.2 Where an original **roof covering** has at some time in the past been replaced with concrete tiles or another material, when required, it should be re-covered in natural slate. Artificial slate, although sometimes difficult to distinguish, when new, from natural material, weathers in a different way and will, over time, appear different from the genuine product.
- 4.14.3 Imported natural slates that match the grey or heather blue colour of the original Welsh slate can be an acceptable alternative. It is however important to ensure the slates are sourced from a reputable quarry to avoid long term problems of the slates weathering.



On the green slopes of Llantrisant the roofs of the buildings form the most prominent component for many of the longer distance views to the settlement.

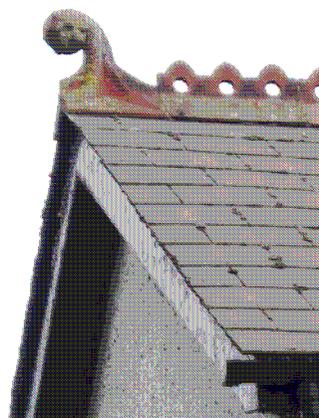
- 4.14.4 If **insulation** is introduced into the roof it should be placed at ceiling level, or between the rafters, subject to the provision of adequate ventilation (via eaves gaps, not proprietary vents fitted to the roof slope). Insulation on top of the rafters will raise the profile of the roof causing potential problems of detailing at the eaves and where it abuts adjacent buildings. However, it should be noted that the introduction of high levels of insulation into older buildings can cause condensation and consequent decay.
- 4.14.5 **Flat roofs** are not characteristic of the area and as such should be avoided.
- 4.14.6 The **ridge line** of the roof may be topped with decorative clay ridge tiles which add considerable interest to the roofscape. These should be retained or replaced with a suitable ridge tile where lost. The ridge tiles should normally be used with a scrolled finial at the end of gable roofs, where there is no chimney.
- 4.14.7 Finer buildings may benefit from a lead ridge. Hipped roofs of the Victorian and Edwardian era were generally of traditional lead roll type and bulkier tiles should be avoided.



Ridge tiles add interest and variety to the skyline of particular importance in Rhondda Cynon Taf, where the topography gives providence to the roovescape.



In Pontypridd, there is a greater use of parapet walls, although the roof coverings behind them still need regular monitoring and maintenance.



Where there is no chimney, a scrolled finial forms a punctuation to the gable end.

4.14.8

**Roof lights and dormers** would not have been a common feature on Valley roofs when they were originally built. Where they are tried, they are in proportion with the elevation as a whole and incorporate a simple pitched roof.



Simple, small and well proportioned dormers are found on some buildings in the area, as seen in Aberdare (above)

4.14.9

New dormer windows should be avoided where possible, as they have a detrimental impact on the roof profile, scale and balance of the building's form and massing. Ideally, modern dormers should be removed. Consideration should be given to using modern, double glazed versions of early cast-iron roof lights (to the correct proportion and size, complete with a vertical glazing bar) to retain the character of the roof as much as possible.



**Rooflights, where used, should be of a suitable conservation type, with a vertical glazing bar and set as low as possible in the plane of the roof as illustrated above**

4.14.10 Where loft spaces are converted and roof lights or dormers are required, they should generally only be situated on rear elevations (as long as they are not highly visible across the valley) as they break up the plane of the continuous roof slope on the street side.

4.14.11 **Chimney stacks and pots** add to the interest and variety of the skyline and streetscape. Chimneys should be retained and repaired with new clay pots provided as necessary. The stability of some tall chimney stacks might have to be investigated by a structural engineer.

4.14.12

Where an original stack has been reduced in height (often capped with concrete slabs) then it should be rebuilt to its original height where it is to be reinstated. Where no evidence of the pattern of the original stack exists, the style should be kept simple, but always with oversailing corbelled courses at the head. The height and size of the stack may be determined by checking the number of flues served and relating to similar stacks on adjacent roofs. Any surviving chimney stack is likely to need repointing as a minimum, due to its exposure.

4.14.13

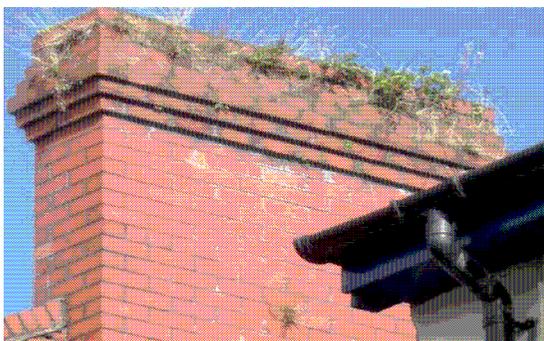
In repairing or rebuilding chimney stacks stone or clay bricks of matching colour should always be used. Bricks can be reclaimed or new but should, if possible, be imperial size, not metric. In certain cases where repair of a known pattern is being carried out, purpose made specials may be required. These can be obtained from specialist brick companies. Generally, concrete bricks should be avoided and chimneystacks should not be rendered.

4.14.14

Lead flashing at the junction between the chimney and the roof should be stepped in the traditional manner and to Lead Sheet Association details (see Useful Contacts). Lead flashing should not be installed by cutting out a

chase on the slope and inserting single lengths of lead cover flashing.

- 4.14.15 Whenever repair works are carried out to chimney stacks it is important that the original form and materials are retained. Should the original chimney stack be beyond repair, or already removed (but the internal breast remains), then rebuilding is an option.

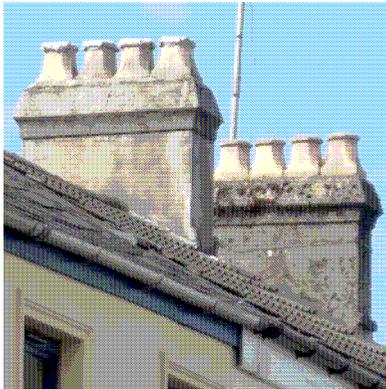


**The scale, and consequence of visual impact, of chimney stacks and pots, is often very significant in relation to the building as a whole**

- 4.14.16 The bottom edge of the roof, where the wall and roof meet, is known as the **eaves**. Originally, the rainwater guttering on the early type buildings would have been supported using metal brackets spiked into the wall or fixed to the rafter ends. For ease of fixing of replacement rainwater gutters fascias have been added to most houses. Later type buildings would have been fitted with small eaves boards or fascias that would have been concealed behind the guttering in most cases. The relationship between the roof slates, eaves and the guttering is important to get right to ensure that the large quantity of rainwater running off the roof is kept clear of the wall surface below. Many buildings have lost their original eaves detail, having been replaced with deep timber or uPVC fascias.

- 4.14.17 If the roof is being replaced, ideally with natural slate, consideration should be given to restoring the eaves to their original form at the same time. If the eaves have been altered, other buildings in the street can be studied to see whether any original details have survived. If no original details survive on other buildings, there may be clues as to the size and position of the original

fascia at the wall head (old paint lines etc. behind the modern, often deeper fascia).



The significance and prominence of the chimney stacks and pots is evident in these examples. Simple, uniform arrangements are most effective, as seen above.

4.14.18

In the absence of any surviving evidence, the replacement fascia should be of timber, with a simple chamfer at its bottom edge. The fascia should be kept as small as practically possible and the use of upside down Torus type skirting board should be avoided.

4.14.19

Close-grained, resin rich, treated Douglas fir or other high quality timber should be used to minimise future problems of rot etc. Deep, square-edged timber fascia boards should be avoided. Fascias should be painted and not stained or varnished.

4.14.20

UPVC fascias should not be used as they do not match the detail found in traditional patterns and their modern profiles and fixing methods detract from the character of old buildings.

4.14.21

Very few original **guttering and downpipes** remain, with the majority replaced by uPVC or, in a small number of cases extruded aluminium. However, these materials are not as robust as cast-iron or cast aluminium and are more susceptible to impact and weather damage.

4.14.22

Traditional cast iron (or cast aluminium) gutters should be used when restoring a building. Simple half-round gutters should be used on

earlier buildings. Half-round and ogee pattern gutters are suitable for the later type buildings.

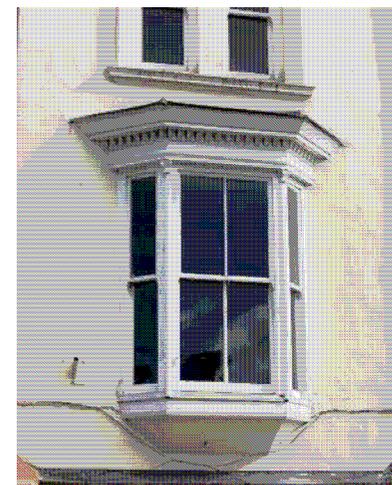
## 4.14.23

**Gables and oriels** enliven the streetscape and are a particularly prominent feature in Aberdare and Pontypridd. They are, by their nature, usually very visually prominent. Gables should always be retained, or reinstated if evidence exists and the detail of the barge board, either plain or more decorative, should be maintained. UPVC material should not be used. Where there is no evidence of the original barge board, a simple replacement design should be used with a moulded or chamfered bottom edge and a cover moulding below the slates. Roof slates should always overhang the front edge of the barge boards.



Decorative gables in Pontypridd (above right and left) contrast with the simpler treatment at Llantrisant (top right and left)

4.14. 24 The majority of oriel windows are constructed in timber with a small, sloping lead or slate roof. Oriels that have been significantly altered should be reinstated where evidence of their original design exists, or the detail can be derived from similar windows in the vicinity. Oriel windows comprise three principal elements: roof, window and base. If any of these elements is missing or altered in scale, the composition and balance of proportions is likely to be impaired. If slate is used for the roof it should match the main roof material, although the size of slates may be reduced. Where lead is used lead hips should also be used. Gutters or downpipes should not be fitted. Principles of the window and mouldings are similar to those adopted for windows to the building as a whole. Decorative pilasters at the corners and at the wall face are often used to provide the visual support for the roof. The base is usually of timber panelling and forms a visual, as well as structural, support for the window. As for other external joinery items, close-grained, resin rich, treated Douglas fir or other high quality timber is recommended as the projecting bays are particularly exposed to weather damage.



A simple, well-proportioned oriel window in its original form.

#### 4.14.25 **Windows, Glazing, Entrances and Doors**

Windows are the 'eyes' of a building and are the central focus of a house's character. The double hung sliding sash window is typical of the majority of buildings that were built before the early 20th century. In this area, side or top hung casements are only characteristic of buildings of more recent development.

4.14.26 Changes to the proportions of **window openings** and / or windows themselves invariably have a detrimental impact on the building facade as a whole, and should be

avoided. The incorporation of trickle vents should also be avoided, due to their detrimental impact on overall character.

4.14.27 Original sash windows should be retained and repaired. Replacement is very rarely necessary. Decay is usually focussed on the lower parts of the window where new timber can be spliced in. The original crown or cylinder glass is thinner and more uneven in surface than modern float glass giving more subtle reflections and where it has survived, this should be retained. Heavier modern glass is likely to require heavier sash weights to counter-balance the window.

4.14.28 Where the window has to be replaced, rather than repaired, the new window should be in timber and an exact match of the original. Original stone cills should be retained. If the stone cill is damaged beyond repair a reclaimed stone cill to match should be used, or a concrete cill to the same proportions.



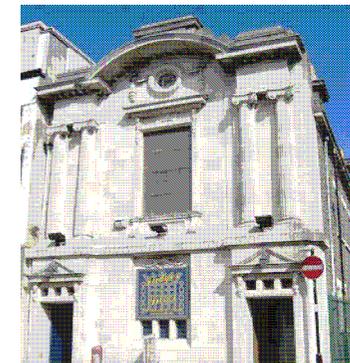
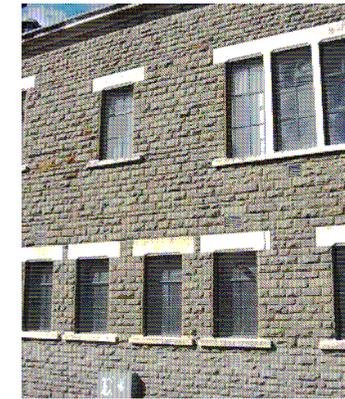
Good examples of window design.

4.14.29 Many of the issues that are relevant to windows and glazing are also applicable to **entrances and doors**. Traditional timber doors should be retained and repaired. Replacements, where necessary, should reinstate the original door style if known, or be in keeping with the period of original construction. Whilst traditional door patterns are, on the whole, more varied than windows there are some general principles that apply.

4.14.30 Front doors were not generally glazed, where they have fanlights above, although later Victorian and Edwardian properties often had upper panels replaced by frosted and / or decorated glass. Fanlights, door cases and other ancillary features should be preserved, repaired and maintained. The design and style of the ironmongery is also important and should match the design and style of the original door. External lever handles should be avoided.

4.14.31 It may be necessary to provide access for the disabled, to conform with accessibility legislation. It is always important to ensure that the regulations and supporting guidance in the Disability Discrimination Act and in Part M of the Building Regulations are correctly interpreted for listed buildings and conservation areas. Where works of this nature are applied they should be

done sensitively and with regard to the overarching principles of proportions, design, materials and workmanship that apply for the building as a whole. Early consultation with the Council's Building Control Section is recommended.



Contrasting materials found in Aberdare.

#### 4.14.32 **Wall surfaces**

There is a great variety in the materials and wall surfaces found in the Rhondda Cynon Taf Valleys area, although smooth rendered 'stucco' and fine-jointed, rock-faced stone predominate. Other materials such as brick, dressed stone and rougher render treatments add contrast, and the commercial area of Pontypridd, in particular, has a great variety of surface treatments.

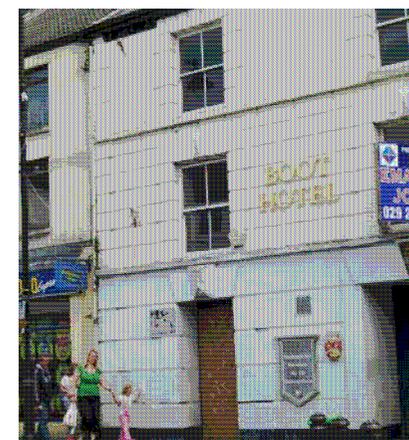
4.14.33 **Stucco** was used to mimic natural stone and is characteristic of the Georgian-Regency period. Its popularity continued well into the latter part of the nineteenth century. Stucco is smooth and often 'lined out' to give the wall the impression of jointed 'blocks'. It was usually left unpainted, or at the most given a coat of pigment that added the illusion of real stone.

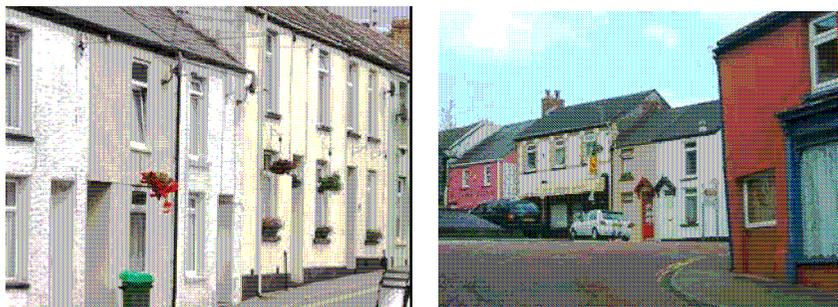
4.14.34 Guidance on the repair of stucco can be found in the book **Mortars, Plasters and Renders in Conservation**, (Ecclesiastical Architect's and Surveyors Association- see Useful Contacts). It should be smooth finished and respect the original lining out (if any). Where individual sections of the wall surface are being replaced, the damaged areas should be cut-back to lines that correspond with the original lining out. Moulded stucco features can generally be removed and re-fixed without too much trouble,

though replacement pieces should be made for places that are irreparably damaged.

4.14.35 **Flat and roughcast renders** are intended to act as a protective outer layer to a building and periodically require repair or replacement.

4.14.36 To function correctly, the render must be no stronger than the material to which it is applied and the render mix should allow the backing masonry to 'breathe'. A weak mix allows the render to accommodate movement and to allow moisture to evaporate freely from the wall. Hard, cement-rich mixes should not be used as their lack of flexibility will cause them to crack, allowing water to penetrate and be trapped. The eventual result is the failure of the render.





**Simpler rendered treatment at Llantrisant (above bottom left and right) and Aberdare (top left and right)**

4.14.37 Only buildings that were originally rendered should be re-rendered. Natural stone should normally be used as a preference to render where there is a choice available. Painted render often requires regular cleaning and repainting, without which the visual appearance of buildings can suffer, whereas stone (or brick) often weathers better and therefore has lower on-going maintenance costs.

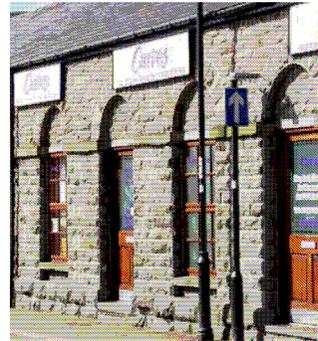
4.14.38 If the existing render is believed to be original, it should be repaired or replaced on a like for like basis. It should be analysed so that the mix may be copied. A sheltered area should be examined in order to determine the original colour and texture of the finish.

4.14.39 Replacement render may be left uncoated, or be decorated with an appropriate lime based or other breathable finish. No impermeable paint system should be used, to avoid the risk of moisture entrapment. Pebbledash, spatterdash or Tyrolean finishes should not be used as these always appear modern.

4.14.40 **Natural stone** is mainly laid in regular courses with fine joint ('ashlar') with the surface left 'rock faced' with fully dressed stone used on cills, lintels and other details. Stone is a highly durable material that should last for many years without any need for maintenance, other than perhaps isolated areas of re-pointing. This should be done by hand, with extreme care so as not to damage the edge of the stone, and made sure that the pointing is brushed back or otherwise recessed back from the edge of the stone. Cement based mortars cause irreparable long-term damage to the masonry by trapping the water in, and should be avoided. Natural lime mortars should be used. 'Lazy' pointing should be avoided, i.e. where re-pointing has simply been added to the existing, rather than existing being scraped out first.

4.14.41 If the **stone or brick** is badly soiled, simple washing with water, either by hand or with sprays, is recommended. Diluted hydro-fluoric

acid, followed by a systematic neutralisation process, may be used to clean very badly soiled brickwork. Alkaline and other chemical cleaners should not be used as they contain soluble salts that tend to erode the wall surface. Industrial sandblasting should not be used. Only a skilled specialist contractor should carry out the cleaning of brickwork and stonework.



4.14.42 **Architectural details**, such as quoins, string courses, plinths etc should be retained, repaired and/or reinstated where applicable.

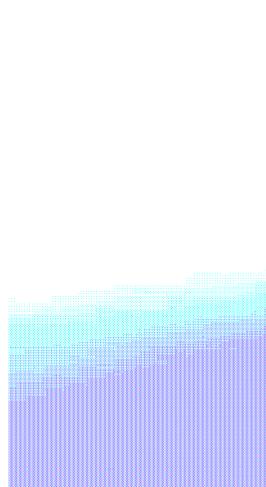
4.14.43 **Street Level**  
The quality of buildings at street level is particularly important in the commercial areas where buildings are frequently built tight to the back of the pavement and the combination of shop fronts, signage, canopies and fascias form the dominant visual impression of an area's character.

4.14.44 The traditional **shop front** forms a 'frame' for the window display, comprising the fascia above, stall riser below and pilasters to either side. The proportions of each component should form a balanced composition. Entrance to the building

may be central or to one side depending on the width of the property.

4.14.45 Decorated steps in recessed doorways should be retained and repaired. The fascia should be finished at the top with a cornice moulding and contained on each side by a console or corbel, which acts as the capital to the pilasters.

4.14.46 The use of tiles on stall risers will help to repel water and provide for a traditional detail.



4.14.47 Existing traditional shop fronts, or surviving components, should be retained and repaired wherever possible. Original features may be concealed beneath later facings. Where shop fronts have been completely lost but photographic evidence of their original design exists, a detailed replica is most appropriate. Where no evidence of the original exists, a modern design that follows the principles of the original 'framing' may be appropriate. The Council acknowledges that traditional shop fronts may not always be appropriate and will consider each frontage on an individual basis.



Traditional design of shop front

4.14.48 Where separate buildings have been combined to form a single unit, each building should have its own distinct frontage to maintain the rhythm and proportions of the streetscape. The same fascia should not be carried across both facades. The window should be sub-divided vertically to maintain proportions characteristic of the building and the context.



Historic photos may offer evidence of the original design of a particular building frontage or the typical treatment in the area. The example (left) is from Canon Street, Aberdare.

Well preserved examples, such as that from Aberdare (right) also provide useful guidance.

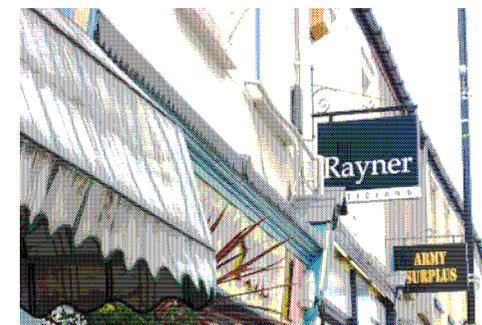
4.14.49 The dimensions and proportions of the fascia are a critical component of the overall character and appearance of the shop front. The fascia board should, generally, be no deeper than 400mm and should be kept well below the level of upper floor windows or projecting bays.

4.14.50 Hand painted or individually fixed lettering in simple styles are preferable and should normally be no larger than 225mm in height. Perspex, plastic or box type **signs** should be avoided.

4.14.51 Lighting should not project significantly and should be discrete and fully integrated with the overall design of the shop front.

4.14.52 Well-designed and crafted projecting signs can enliven the street scene. The same principles of proportion, balance, graphics and materials that are applicable to shopfront fascias should also be applied to projecting signs, where they are incorporated.

4.14.53 Retractable **blinds and canopies** are often appropriate and should be a minimum of 2.1 metres above ground level.





Facias, signs canopies and blades form an important part of the liveliness and texture of the streetscape

4.14.54 **Roller shutter** security screens can have a very significant impact on the shop front and street scene as a whole. External steel roller shutters should be avoided if possible and should only be used if the roller box is integrated into the building and not attached to the exterior of the shopfront. Alternatives include the use of toughened glass and / or internal metal lattice grilles. Recessed doorways can be secured with wrought iron or steel gates. A stall riser can act as a preventative alternative to illegal access.

4.14.55 Plain external roller shutters in nearly all cases will be considered unacceptable due to their dominant visual impact on the streetscape. Where security **alarm boxes** are required, their location and colour should ensure preservation of character.



A lattice brick shutter (preferably internal) provides a much more subtle feature than a bulky solid roller shutter.

4.14.56 Whilst stucco and render were always **painted**, brick, stone and tiling rarely were. Timber joinery should be painted in strong dark colours, but vivid colours and strong contrasts should be avoided. Ironwork should be painted in black, dark green or a deep purple-bronze. In general, a limited range should be used as they will result in a more co-ordinated and subtle overall appearance. The Council may provide guidance on appropriate paint.

4.14.57 Although the commercial and retail areas of the town centres have buildings generally built tight to the back of the pavement, and therefore no

**boundary treatment** is required, in areas which were, or remain, in residential use, the boundary walls and railings are particularly important in their contribution to the overall character and quality of the street scene.



Darker colours of the shop fronts can contrast attractively with the lighter render above.

4.14.58 Traditional boundary walls and railings should not be removed to allow on-plot car parking.

#### 4.14.59 **New Buildings and Extensions**

Where **new development and/or extensions to buildings** are proposed it is important that they are guided by sound principles of urban design, as well as sympathetic detailing in relation to its historic context.

4.14.60 The following principles should apply to such developments:

- Preserving and reinforcing the distinctive pattern of historic development, including street patterns, open spaces and trees, and plot boundaries;
- Maintaining key views and vistas within, into and out of the town centre;
- Reinforcing distinctive architectural character of the town centre through an informed understanding of its building forms & styles, features & materials; Pastiche forms of development and the superficial echoing of historic features in new buildings should be avoided;
- Respecting the scale & massing of surrounding buildings. It is essential that new development is not out of scale with existing buildings by way of its height, floor levels, size of windows and doors, overall massing & the roofscape;
- Utilising high quality materials sympathetic to the heritage context;
- Incorporating, where appropriate, contemporary elements in the design to make the building 'of its time' rather than a mere pastiche of previous styles and eras.

4.14.61 **Public Realm and Streetscape**

The varied characteristics of the town centres within Rhondda Cynon Taf reflect the respective history and development of different areas, and also of their scale, location, setting and patterns of use, both historic and contemporary.

character and identity and reinforces issues of safety, security, comfort, variety and interest.

**Encouraging activity-** active frontages help promote on-street activity and vibrancy as well as providing over-looking and natural surveillance to a space or street.

4.14.62 The characteristics of the built form are reflected in the **public realm and street scene** of the different settlements, and in the choice and usage of materials. The importance and role of good public realm design is thoroughly detailed in Public Realm Design in the Heads of the Valleys (2008).

**Variety and interest-** like the buildings in a street scene, the public realm needs as much careful consideration of the balance of uniformity and variety, to create a range of opportunities and settings for a variety of users, amenities and social groups.

4.14.63 The treatment of the spaces between the buildings is critically important in the overall quality and character of an area, following sound principles of urban design:

**Context-** an appreciation of the local setting and identity of an area coupled with a sympathetic choice of materials and details to respond to, and reinforce, the local character of the place.

**Creating spaces and places-** the degree of openness or enclosure of a space, together with its scale, form and massing, helps to give it a





#### 4.14.64 **Energy and Environment**

Climate change has led to an increased awareness of the need for energy conservation and a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions, which are reflected in changes in Building Regulations, although the retention of existing buildings and their components, as opposed to rebuilding or replacement, is, in itself a sustainable solution, in light of the holistic energy requirements to construct a new building. However, there are measures that can be taken within an existing building to improve energy efficiency which do not conflict with any conservation strategies or issues. These include:

4.14.65

- Improved efficiency of heating systems and boilers;
- Better control of lighting and heating;
- Use of low-energy light bulbs;
- Regular maintenance of boilers and services infrastructure to maintain efficiency;
- Additional insulation in roof spaces and walls; and
- Draught exclusion, whilst retaining the building's need to 'breathe'.

4.14.66

The incorporation of **renewable energy producers** such as solar panels, can also be considered, but should be placed where they do not adversely affect a building's character, such as on out buildings and / or rear roofs where they are less visually prominent. Wind turbines are less easy to disguise and may not be acceptable in prominent locations in sensitive areas.

Appropriately conceived **secondary glazing** can provide additional thermal insulation and draught-proofing, as can the restoration or reinstatement of internal window shutters where this was a feature of a building.

## 5. Useful Contacts

Development Control Officers in the Regeneration and Planning Service of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council are able to give advice on town centre proposals. Whether the proposal involves a minor or major change, pre-application advice is recommended.

For enquiries please contact:

**Development Control**, Sardis House, Sardis Road,  
Pontypridd, CF37 1DU  
(Office hours – Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5pm)  
Tel: 01443 494700 Fax: 01443 494718 Email:  
PlanningServices@rctcbc.gov.uk

Financial support for improvements to commercial properties may be available from Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC or other public sector organisations. For guidance on whether your property is eligible for financial assistance please contact:

**Business Support Team**, Floor 5 Ty Pennant, Pontypridd  
CF37 2SW  
Tel: 01443 495169 Fax: 01443 407725 Email:  
[invest@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:invest@rctcbc.gov.uk)

Outside Bodies (further relevant external contacts are available in the Historic Built Environment SPG):

## **Cadw**

**Cadw is the historic environment agency within the Welsh Assembly Government with responsibility for protecting, conserving, and promoting an appreciation of the historic environment of Wales.**

Welsh Assembly Government, Plas Carew, Unit 5/7 Cefn Coed, Parc Nantgarw, Cardiff, CF15 7QQ.

Tel: 01443 336000, Fax: 01443 336001,

[Cadw@Wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Cadw@Wales.gsi.gov.uk) [www.cadw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk)

## **The Civic Trust**

**The Civic Trust for Wales promotes civic pride as a means to improving the quality of life for all in the places where they live and work, and encourages community action, good design, sustainable development and respect for the built environment amongst people of all ages.**

14-16 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6DG.

Tel: 020 7539 7900, Fax: 020 7539 7901, [www.civictrust.org.uk](http://www.civictrust.org.uk)

## **Ecclesiastical Architects and Surveyors Association**

**The Ecclesiastical Architects' and Surveyors' Association promotes good standards of design and repair of ecclesiastical buildings across all denominations.**

Andrew Shepphard, Elden Minns & Co Ltd, 453 Glossop Road Sheffield, S10 2PT

Tel: 01142 662458, Fax: 01142 662459, [www.easanet.co.uk](http://www.easanet.co.uk)

## **Institute of Historic Building Conservation**

**The IHBC is the principal professional body for the building conservation practitioners and historic environment specialists.**

IHBC Business Office, Jubilee House, High Street, Tisbury, SP3 6HA.

Tel: 01747 873133, Fax: 01747 871718, [admin@ihbc.org.uk](mailto:admin@ihbc.org.uk)  
[www.ihbc.org.uk](http://www.ihbc.org.uk)

## **Lead Sheet Association**

**Independent technical body advising on the design, specification and application of Rolled Lead Sheet**

Unit 10 Archers Park, Banbridges Road, East Peckham, Tonbridge, Kent, TN12 5HP

Tel: 01622 872432, Fax: 01622 871649

[www.leadsheetassociation.org.uk](http://www.leadsheetassociation.org.uk)

## **Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Conservation Group**

**The Royal Institute of British Architects is the UK body for architecture and the architectural profession.**

66 Portland Place, London, W1B 1AD.  
Tel: 020 7580 5333, Fax: 020 7255 1541.  
[info@inst.riba.org](mailto:info@inst.riba.org) [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com)

**Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, Building Conservation Group**

12 Great George Street, Parliament Square, London, SW1P 3AD.  
Tel: 0870 333 1600, Fax: 020 7334 3811.  
[contact@rcis.org](mailto:contact@rcis.org) [www.rics.org.uk](http://www.rics.org.uk)

## 6. Further Reading

The following documents provide useful guidance during the preparation of any development proposals in Rhondda Cynon Taf town centres:

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan 2006– 2021

Planning Policy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002)

Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS) 01/2008

Technical Advice Note 12: Design (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009)

Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 and Circular 61/96

Rhondda Cynon Taf Heritage Strategy 2007 – 2010 'Pride of Place'

Aberdare Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2008

Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance (English Heritage, 2008)

Stitch in Time (Institute of Historic Building Conservation/SPAB, 2002)

Maintain Your Building website (Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings, 2008)

My Valleys House website (Valleys Built Heritage Project, 2006)

Ferndale Regeneration Strategy, 2006

Llantrisant Old Town Regeneration Strategy, 2005

Mountain Ash Town Centre Regeneration Study, 2002

Pontypridd Regeneration Strategy, 2005

Porth Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, 2003

Tonyrefail Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, 2006

Treorchy Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, 2003

Further guidance can be provided from the use of historic photographs. Where these are available, they may be able to demonstrate how buildings used to appear with their heritage detailing. Local libraries and the County Records Office hold a range of books, maps and individual photographs of many town centre areas.

## 7. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Day-to-Day Maintenance

Building owners and occupiers should ensure that the following tasks are carried out on a regular basis.

**Clearing leaves** especially after the autumn, is probably the single most important task that owners and occupiers can take with particular focus on gullies and rainwater goods. A period of heavy rainfall is the best time to identify faults.

**Controlling plant growth** which can accelerate decay and sometimes cause structural damage. Ivy should be killed by cutting near the ground and allowing it to wither before attempting to remove its roots from the wall.

**Removing bird droppings** which contain damaging salts. However, there are health and safety issues involved, and large deposits should be removed by a specialist firm.

**Looking for insect attack and fungal decay** both of which can be caused by damp penetration and poor ventilation.

**Checking ventilation** to ensure that any grilles which ventilate the spaces under floors are not blocked. Lack of ventilation may lead to conditions in which fungal decay can take hold.

**Clearing snow** which can accumulate in gutters and other areas, allowing moisture to bridge flashings and damp proof courses. Wooden or plastic shovels should be used to clear snow.

### Appendix 2: Minor Repairs and Maintenance

The following are examples of minor works of repair and maintenance that would normally be carried out by a local builder. They should be carried out when identified as required, to prevent the building falling into disrepair.

- Repairs to roofs including slipped slates and dislodged flashings;
- Repairs of eaves, gutters and down pipes;
- Rodding and inspection of underground storm water drains;
- Re-pointing of stonework and patch repairs to renders and stucco;
- Repainting external woodwork (every five years depending on paint system);
- Repairs to cracked glazing and the replacement of loose putty.