

- 13 **Maintenance** - Restating the case for planned maintenance as against knee jerk reactions, the potential savings to be made in looking after your property and avoiding large unforeseen bills by so doing. Simple forward planning with recommendations in relation to the more essential tasks.

The Property Doctor

A stitch in time...

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Our home is one of the most important things in our life and it is also one of the most expensive but we generally pay less attention to it than we do with our cars. A car is subject to an MOT annually after 3 years, then there are the tyres, brakes, oil change, plugs and so on as well the time we spend washing it! The purpose of this week's article, is to remind home owners, that they need to look after their property in order to maintain its value and that this so called "planned" maintenance will offer a degree of protection against unexpected repairs which can cause a severe strain on the household budget.

Planned maintenance operates widely in the management of commercial property but it has also a use with regard to domestic property. It need not comprise any significant document as it sometimes does in the commercial field but if a homeowner thinks over a period of say 5 to 10 years then it is possible to plan so that the maintenance activity is actioned at the right time. This will allow for budgeting, will also improve the longevity of those elements of buildings that deteriorate e.g. woodwork and will also significantly reduce the likelihood of that expensive emergency repair.

We will be looking only at the external elements of the building and grounds. Remember however to consider all safety aspects, both your own and others, before climbing a ladder or climbing onto the roof and if it cannot be done safely then arrange for a tradesman to inspect for you.

Roof – check your roof regularly, especially after storms. With pitched roofs, look for dislodged tiles or slates on the ground or in the gutters, as this indicates that there may be a problem. Have the tiles or slates reinstated as soon as possible before dampness can get into the attic and damage roof timbers. It is also useful to check your attic for leaks after heavy rain.

Check lead flashings and also the mortar fillets at chimneys for signs of deterioration. Often the lead can become dislodged and the mortar eroded, thus allowing the passage of moisture into the building. Also check parapet walls for decay of the masonry and mortar joints and the lead flashings behind. Check the gutters too.

Moss growing on the roof surface may be unsightly and is often a problem when it falls off and blocks the gutters, so brush it off if the growth becomes significant.

Check flat roofs annually, look for holes, splits or blistering of felt or asphalt and watch out for ponding of water.

Drainage - often a neglected aspect and frequently gives rise to problems. Clear gutters regularly. This will depend on whether your property is close to trees. At least, clear gutters in the autumn (after leaves fall) and also in the spring. Check also that the down pipes are flowing. It is best to visually check your gutters during heavy rain, as this will indicate

problems. Don't forget also to check rainwater outlets on flat roofs as very often, loose chippings and leaves can cause blockages.

Parapet and valley gutters deserve close attention due to their more inaccessible locations. Whilst inspecting watch out that you don't inadvertently damage the lead linings.

Walls – external walls do not normally require a high level of maintenance. You should, however, annually check for deterioration of mortar pointing and the condition of render. Deeply eroded mortar joints should be raked out and repointed. Sand and cement is sufficient for modern buildings but the use of lime mortar for older and historic buildings is recommended. Take professional advice. Look out for cracks in render as these will allow water ingress and result in deterioration of the bonding of the render to the material behind. Also cracking can indicate other problems like settlement or other movement problems. Better to take professional advice if this is the case.

Check the lower parts of walls and ensure that the grounds or garden features do not rise unduly and certainly not above the level of the damp proof course, as breaching this will result in moisture ingress through the wall. Check that under floor vents are not blocked.

Paintwork - this is one of the areas of planned maintenance where you can be most effective. All woodwork should be checked annually. Look out for failure of the paint, blistering, flaking and wood rot. Pay particular attention to the most exposed (westerly) areas of the building as deterioration can be significant here. Also, carefully check your windows, particularly the sills as they tend to deteriorate first. Remember that some uPVC windows have timber sub-frames, so check them as well. Check timber doors, particularly the lower sections of the frames and sills as these areas often are suspect. In Scotland, expect to repaint woodwork every 3 to 5 years. It has to be emphasized, that woodwork painted to this frequency will have a significantly longer lifespan than if ignored.

External grounds – If you have any gulleys or other drainage outlets these should be checked annually. Their operation can best be assessed during heavy rain. It is also wise to lift manhole covers annually as well to ensure that soil waste is draining properly, get someone to flush the toilet and wait!

Check garden walls, whether brick, stone or timber, annually. This is important, as problems with a boundary wall have implications on your neighbour and the public (if your wall bounds a public walkway or pavement). Look out for cracks, and especially for any signs of the wall leaning. Take your spirit level and check! Monitor trees growing close to the boundary as roots can cause problems. With regard to timber fences check that the posts are securely sunk into the ground and look out for deterioration of the timber at ground level, often caused by lack of preservative treatment during installation.

The above is not meant to be an exhaustive list but purely a flavour of the primary elements of your building you should be inspecting and when, to ensure a longer lifespan and thus reduce emergency repairs. Finally, please remember to maintain your building safely. Think carefully before you climb a ladder and ensure someone assists you but above all, if in doubt then seek the services of a reputable professional builder.

If you have any queries, or need to consult the Property Doctor please contact either Colin Bruce or Brian Shaw on 01383 824450 or by mobile on 07900 913975, Bruce Shaw Property Consultants Limited, 6 Forth Reach, Dalgety Bay, Fife KY11 9FF or visit us on-line at www.bruce-shaw.co.uk.