

6. **External Joinery** - Discussing the principle materials involved and the importance of looking closely at the type and condition of the windows and conservatory appended to the property being considered for purchase. The potential problems associated with window and conservatory installations including the quality issues surrounding their physical insertion or erection either into or adjacent to the property. Garage and other doors will also be discussed in brief.

# The Property Doctor

Windows: to replace or not replace, that is the question?

*Written by Colin Bruce, Director, Bruce Shaw Property Consultants Limited*

...Next to buying your house and car, the money expended on replacement windows, doors and eaves/soffit renewals is probably one of the largest maintenance related purchases that most people will ever make. So what approach should you take to the problem and how do you ensure that you get what you pay for? Well, it all starts by justifying the replacement of your existing windows or other elements in the first place. Understandably, joinery replacements often follow rot or ironmongery failures. Often the far less expensive and less disruptive option, to repair and upgrade the existing windows is ignored. If the basic frames are generally sound, then glass and ironmongery can easily be replaced and improved to better comply with current standards.

Obviously, this initial appraisal of the existing joinery elements is critical and finding honest advice can prove problematic. However there are a number of companies that specialise solely in glass, whilst others offer maintenance and replacement of ironmongery. As a general rule we would recommend that any appraisal should look to secure a minimum 10 year life expectancy from any joinery being retained. Economics will play a part in any decision making process.

If you choose to replace your windows or other external joinery elements, how do you choose what to replace them with and to what design? Firstly you should be aware that **any** change of material **or** design affecting your windows, will require you to obtain a Building Warrant and in many cases will also require the submission of a Planning Application. The only absolute means of avoiding statutory applications is where the replacement element is identical to that being removed. Be aware this does not even allow upgrading single to double glazing under Planning Legislation in certain instances.

Accepting that you do wish to replace your windows with an alternative material or design, which one is best for you? The criteria that you may wish to consider will probably include: cost, appearance and future maintenance, access for cleaning, solar control and thermal efficiency. The options will include: timber, (softwood & hardwood) with paint or stained finishes, uPVC in white, coloured or wood grained effects, aluminium or steel self finished or factory colour coated. Without wishing to appear critical of any particular option, please simply be aware that none of these options are maintenance free. Even uPVC frames require periodic replacement of sealants and moving parts and the plastic finish eventually discolours under the sun's ultra-violet rays, particularly on Southern aspects. Some of these materials look better than others on traditionally built properties although sometimes the location and access for future maintenance may alone dictate which material offers the best compromise.

As for design, we would strongly recommend caution in this department. All too often windows are installed which do not comply with statutory requirements. This occurrence can both

hamper the later selling of the property but perhaps more importantly could also result in personal or third party injury for which you could be held liable. Issues regularly occurring include failures to use safety glass beneath 'waist level'; failures to afford adequate child safety devices on upper floors; window operation that poses a risk to passers by; and a lack of adequate facilities to clean the windows from the interior on upper floors. In addition, window installers have failed on occasion to ensure windows comply with other Building Legislation issues including ventilation and the ability of the window to prevent leaks.

In Scotland because of the weather, windows are normally set behind what is termed a rebated jamb. Effectively this is a recess that covers the perimeter of the window frame giving at least a 10 - 15mm 'cover' to all edges. Often we witness replacement windows incorrectly installed with little or no edge cover, the result being that the mastic sealant is the only material stopping wind driven rain from entering behind the frame and potentially damaging internal finishes. Contractors are able to install windows that are too small more easily by avoiding disruption to render and or plaster finishes. Another thing to watch out for is the re-use of original timber sub-frames or 'cases' that are sometimes not fully checked for rot before fitting new metal or plastic casement windows.

As for other elements, quality is usually self evident. If it looks good at close quarters it normally is. Poorly specified conservatories and 'gutter lining' systems will deteriorate more readily and will not likely last the lifetime of the house. Care is required as the old adage; "you only get what you pay for" is all too often relevant. Although, that certainly does not mean the most expensive option will always be the best.

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 (24 hours) 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](http://www.bruce-shaw.co.uk).