

Windows in Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas



These planning guidelines set out what we look for when someone wants to carry out work to windows in a listed building, or a traditional unlisted building in a conservation area.

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1. PLANNING PERMISSION AND LISTED BUILDING CONSENT

You will need planning permission if you plan to replace or repair windows in:

1. A conservation area
2. Any listed building, including tenements, flats and business properties (this is known as listed building consent).

You may also need a building warrant and you should check with the Building Standards and Safety service.

Windows are a vital part of a building's character. By replacing them using a different style or material, it can have a negative effect on the appearance of the building. Small changes may only affect one building, but many small changes over time can be detrimental to the character of a whole area.

In many of Fife's domestic properties the traditional window is timber sash and case: windows that slide up and down to open. They have been in continuous use since the late 17th Century. While their style may have changed over the years, it is a testament to their

effectiveness and construction that they have survived so long.

Timber windows differ greatly in terms of their style and detailing. Some older properties may have leaded windows or casement windows that open inwards and are manufactured of timber, cast iron or later, steel. In Georgian buildings, round headed windows and semi-circular fanlights often feature; and in Victorian and Edwardian buildings, stained glass can be an important element of windows and doors.

It is an offence to alter the character of a listed building without permission and this applies to replacement windows. Work to listed buildings with international, national or regional importance (known as Category A and B listed buildings) must be formally approved by [Historic Environment Scotland](#).

2. WHAT WE LOOK FOR

In general we will consider whether your proposals protect and enhance the traditional character and appearance of the building, if it is listed and the area, if it is in a conservation area. If you live in a tenement or flat you must make sure that new windows are in keeping with the original scheme, so that uniformity can be retained.

In listed buildings you must:

- Retain and repair existing traditional windows where possible
- Ensure that replacement windows match the original in every detail including materials, design, opening method and paint finish.
- Take the opportunity of installing appropriate new windows where the existing windows are modern replacements not in keeping with the building.

In traditional, unlisted buildings in conservation areas you must:

- Retain and repair existing traditional windows where possible
- Ensure that replacement windows on the front and all sides of the building visible to the public match the original in every detail including materials, design, opening method and paint finish.

In listed buildings and conservation areas you must not use:

- External secondary glazing
- Plant-on or sandwich astragals (non-structural astragals applied to the glass surface).

3. ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Repairing and Upgrading Existing Windows

It may be cheaper to repair and upgrade existing timber windows and features such as shutters to modern standards rather than to replace them, and retention of original features is always preferable in historic buildings or areas because it retains character and authenticity. Appropriate repairs will often improve the thermal efficiency of your home without the negative effects that may result from the use of inappropriate modern materials.

Retaining and repairing existing windows is a sustainable way of improving your home. Many timber windows and doors have lasted over 200 years. In contrast, some modern windows may only last 20 years and when they fail, replacement of the whole unit is often necessary.

Original crown or cylinder glass may remain in timber windows. This has a subtle, rippled effect that can't be created in modern glass and adds greatly to the character of a building. Every effort should be made to retain it.

Replacement Windows

If windows have deteriorated to the extent that repair is no longer viable, replacement windows should replicate the original in every respect. They should be fitted in the same plane as the originals, made up of timber sections (the profile and dimension of which match the originals) and have the meeting rails in the same position as the originals. Mullions (vertical dividers that separate windows) should be retained.

It is also important to retain the original method of opening the window. Modern tilt-and-turn or 'mock' sash and case windows can ruin a building's

appearance. They do not adequately replicate the features of traditional windows and are not as maintenance free as is often claimed. If opening windows for cleaning is necessary, 'Simplex' hinges can be fitted which allow the lower sash to open inwards.

When considering repairing or replacing timber windows, you should always consult a professional who has experience of working on historic buildings.

Modern Materials

Modern materials are not usually compatible with the design and function of traditional buildings. Whilst uPVC or plastic is often used for replacement windows, it is not acceptable for use in listed buildings or traditional buildings in a conservation area because the result is historically inaccurate, aesthetically inappropriate and detracts from the character and authenticity of the building or area. Furthermore, the sealed unit that results can cause condensation and other problems in older buildings due to restricted air circulation, particularly where existing flues or chimneys have been blocked.

Double Glazing

Double glazing is often seen as a universal solution to all window problems, but it will not by itself cut down on noise or eliminate draughts. Where these are present, the fit of the window should first be checked by a professional, as minor repairs can often improve performance. Not only is double glazing visually disruptive it is not a cost effective way of retaining heat. In certain types of buildings such as steadings where window fittings are rare, suitably designed double glazing may be appropriate when the building is to be converted to another use.

Double glazing can occasionally be installed in existing windows but poses problems in sash windows. These use weights that balance the windows and the extra glass can mean bigger weights are needed – but are too big to fit.

Double glazing is also very difficult to install satisfactorily in windows with glazing bars. This is because the large space between panes of glass leads to very thick window sections. If you wish to consider the installation of double glazing in an existing window this may be acceptable in a C(S) listed building or in an unlisted building in a conservation area if the existing windows are in appropriate modern replacements.

Draught-Stripping and Secondary Glazing

Draught-stripping can be fitted in existing windows and is a cost effective way of improving heat and noise insulation and reducing the amount of air entering the window.

If internal shutters remain in the building these are a good way of improving insulation and preventing draughts. Where there are no internal shutters, you may want to consider installing secondary glazing. This retains the original fabric and character of the windows but improves heat and noise insulation. It is often the best solution for historic buildings as it can be unobtrusive and easily removed.

Benefits of Sash and Case Windows

- They retain the original character and authenticity of the building
- The degree of ventilation can be easily controlled
- Blinds, curtains, and shutters can be fitted and used without interfering with the operation of the window, as can external security bars and grilles.
- Reflected sound from outside is avoided as the windows do not project at an angle.
- The construction allows components of the window to be repaired and replaced individually.
- Good quality softwood from sustainable sources can be used to repair or replace timber windows, which is of less cost to the environment than the manufacture and disposal of uPVC.

Rooflights

Traditionally rooflights were used to light attics and constructed in cast iron with one or two small glass panes. Modern rooflights can be used to convert an attic space into a living area. If you are considering having one fitted you will need a building warrant to make sure that the Council's Building Standards and Safety service deem the works to be acceptable.

If your property is listed or in a conservation area you may be able to get permission to fit a rooflight as long as you follow these guidelines

- The rooflight should preferably be on a roof at the rear or out of public view.
- Rooflights should be positioned and centred above the main windows to give the building a balanced and symmetrical look.
- You should install as few rooflights as possible in keeping with building regulation requirements.
- The rooflight should be of a 'conservation' standard (historically accurate in detailing) and should be flush to the roof, not raised from it.
- For most buildings the width of a rooflight should be smaller than its length.
- Several, smaller rooflights are preferable to one large, wide one.

4. DO'S AND DON'TS

Do

- Do apply for planning permission or listed building consent
- Do make sure the windows you are selecting preserve or enhance the character of the building and comply with the guidelines above.

Don't

- Don't sign any contract until you have checked with us that the windows you plan to put in meet our guidelines.
- Don't forget we can take action to make you remove any replacement windows that need consent but do not have it.

For further information on historic windows please see the following publications:

[Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Windows](#)