

Looking after your building – *keeping your home in good repair*



East Lothian
Council

Looking after your building

To keep your building in a good state of repair it is important that you carry out regular inspections and maintenance. Poor building condition is likely to reduce property value, lead to spiralling repair bills and could result in cold and damp living conditions. By keeping on top of routine maintenance and spotting defects early, you can save yourself time and money and improve living conditions. Follow our guide for advice on being a responsible owner and maintaining the value of your property:

1 Check your building regularly

Ideally you should get a building condition survey carried out every five years by an experienced professional such as an architect or surveyor. At the very least you should aim to carry out a quick survey yourself every year and particularly after a storm or high winds (see the section Checking your Building).

2 Put together a list of past repairs

You should try to put together a record of work carried out in the past. Make a note of when the work was carried out, who the contractor was and if there is a guarantee for the work in place. This information will help you plan for future repairs and will be useful to refer back to. Keep it in a safe place and pass the file on to the new owner if you move. If you live in a shared building you could give a copy of the information to your neighbours.

3 Check the typical length of life of your building

For example, is your roof past its sell by date? See the table overleaf for further details.

4 Put together a maintenance plan

A maintenance plan details what repairs will be carried out over a period, usually five years. The plan helps you to prioritise repairs, it also helps you to prepare and save for more extensive works. The plan should include a schedule of inspections and routine maintenance on the building. For further advice on maintenance plans contact the Private Sector Housing Team.

5 Plan for future repairs or maintenance

All parts of buildings decay over time. By planning for future repairs and maintenance, you can avoid being caught out by emergency repairs, which could be expensive.

6 Common repairs

If you live in a flat, the responsibility for the building will be shared with the other owners in the block. This means there are other considerations when thinking about building maintenance.

Find out your repair and maintenance responsibilities

Your exact responsibilities are set out in your Title Deeds and under the Occupiers Liability Act (Scotland) 1960. If you do not hold a copy of your Title Deeds, your solicitor should be able to provide these. A separate information sheet called Reading your Title Deeds is available from the Private Sector Housing Team. If you bought your home from the Council under Right to Buy legislation you are responsible for a share of building repairs such as to the roof, chimney or door entry system.

Organising repairs to your building

Talk to your co-owners and agree how to deal with repairs and maintenance. Some of them may have useful skills or contacts in the field. More information about organising common repairs can be found in our leaflet Organising Repairs. If some owners will not cooperate, the Council may be able to help, contact the Private Sector Housing Team for more information.

Building maintenance schedule

This table provides a general guide on regular maintenance. It shows what you should be doing to maintain your property and how long you should expect elements of your building to last before some repair is required. You should get a survey carried out at least every 5 years to establish the actual condition.

Every Year

- Gutter cleaning
- Arrange a roof inspection and organise any minor repairs (such as refixing loose slates)
- Check the condition of flashings on the roof and cupolas
- Repair harling and render cement coatings
- Check chimney heads and chimney pots
- Check TV aerials and fixings

Every 3 – 5 Years

- Door entry systems
- External paint work on doors and windows
- Gutters and downpipes

Every 5 – 10 Years

- Stair painting
- Mastic around windows
- Repair felt roof coverings

Every 10 – 15 Years

- Pointing – mortar between stone/brick in walls
- Replace uPVC windows

Every 10 – 20 Years

- Renew render coatings on walls or chimneys

Every 20 – 30 Years

- Replace felt roof coverings
- Major overhaul of tiling on roofs

Every 40 – 50 Years

- Replace lead roofs
- Replace tiled roofs
- Some work to sandstone walls and chimney heads

Every 50 – 100 Years

- Replace slated roofs
- Replace cast iron gutters and downpipes
- Replace external woodwork
- Replace cast iron railings.

Checking your building

Regular checks of your building are an important part of your maintenance plan. You should arrange for a professional inspection every five years but there are some simple checks you can carry out yourself. You should carry out an inspection at least every year, and particularly after a storm or high winds.

Before you begin draw a sketch of the building so you can mark on any problems. Use the diagram at the back of this leaflet to identify the different parts of the building which you are checking.

Stay Safe – do not take any risks. If you are not sure if something is safe to do, do not do it.

If you are using a ladder or other equipment, make sure you know how to use it safely. Sometimes you might get the best view from the ground, using a pair of binoculars.

WORK ROUND THE BUILDING USING THE CHECKLIST AND DIAGRAM ON PAGES 8 TO 14.

1 Inside the building

Top floor rooms

You should check the ceiling for signs of water coming from a damaged roof, for example patches of damp or mould

Rooms with an outside wall

Check for signs of water coming in, for example stains or mould on the wall

Rooms at ground level or below (internal)

Check for damp or wet patches, this could indicate raising damp

Roof space

You should only go into the roof space if it is properly floored.

- Joists, rafters, joins between roofs and walls and other visible surfaces - check for signs of rot, damp or water damage.
- Insulation – there should be a minimum of 100mm (if there is less than 100mm the South East Scotland Energy advice centre can advise of possible grants or loans to top up).
- Water tank – is the tank insulated? Are pipes well lagged to prevent frost damage? Does it have a cover on the top? Consider replacing any lead pipes.



Common stairs and passages

Check for:

- Increasing cracks, for example between stair treads (why not take a picture of small cracks and compare the picture when you carry out the next inspection)
- Treads which are uneven or worn
- Loose or missing balusters or rails
- Loose plasterwork
- Broken or inadequate locks on main doors
- Broken or rotten stair windows.

2 Outside the building

Roof

You should not go on to the roof – this is a job for a professional. However you may be able to carry out some examination of your property from another high building, for example from a neighbour's house across the road.

Refer to the descriptions and diagram at the end of this leaflet for the areas you should be looking at. Pay special attention to any areas above water damage you have identified from your internal survey.

Walls and chimneys

Look for cracks, areas of decayed stone, gaps in the pointing (cement between bricks or stones), bulging or leaning walls. If there are pieces of cement or stone on the ground these could be a sign that the wall is decaying.

Paintwork

Check for any bare wood on windows or doors. Check the mastic (sealant between the window frame and the wall) is intact.

Gutters and downpipes

Check for rust, cracks, leaks and loose fixings. Check they are clear from blockages, for example vegetation.

Paths and boundaries

Is there anything that could cause a trip or fall? Are railings or boundary walls in good condition?

Drains and gratings

Are they clear of sticks, stones and leaves? Does water flow away quickly?

Air vents (at ground level)

These should be clear of the ground and covered with a grating to stop vermin getting in.

Trees

Are there any trees next to the building that could hit telephone or power lines, or damage the building? Are slabs or tarmac being lifted by the roots of a tree?

If so, this could indicate the roots could also damage the foundations of the building.

After the inspection

If you find any problems, you should take action as soon as possible.

The leaflet 'Organising Repairs to your Building' gives useful information on how to go about arranging work.

Even if there are no problems you should keep a note of the condition of the building. At the next inspection you can refer back to this record and compare the condition. This will give you a good indication of how quickly the condition of the building is changing.

Checking your building

EXTERNAL WALLS

- 1 LINTELS
Look for cracks or decay in stonework above doors and windows.
- 2 CILLS
Look for cracks or decay in stonework below windows.
- 3 STONEWORK
Look for loose stone, especially in overhanging areas of the building, cracks, flaking or decayed stonework.
- 4 POINTING
Look for gaps in the mortar between the stonework which will let water in.
- 5 BULGES/LEANING WALLS
Look for areas where the external wall protrudes, bulges out or leans - this can indicate structural problems.

AROUND THE BUILDING

- 6 TREES
Look for trees which could damage the building or telephone or power lines.
- 7 AIR VENTS
Should be clear of the ground and covered to stop vermin and debris getting in.
- 8 RAILINGS AND BOUNDARY WALLS
Check they are in good condition.
- 9 PATHS
Look for anything which could cause a trip or fall.
- 10 DRAINS AND GRATINGS
Remove blockages, for example sticks, stones or vegetation.



11 CHIMNEYS

Look for cracks, missing or decayed stone or render, gaps in pointing, bulging or leaning sides, loose chimney pots.

12 FLASHINGS

Look for cracked or missing sections of flashings along chimney bases, walls of adjoining properties and the apex of the roof.

13 ROOF COVERINGS

Look for damaged or missing tiles or slates, cracks or blisters on felt roofing.

14 GUTTERS AND DOWNPIPES

Look for rust, cracks or missing sections, loose fixings, leaks - may be indicated by damp patches on walls, blockages - may be indicated by vegetation growing.



ROOF SPACE

15 JOISTS, RAFTERS, JOINTS BETWEEN ROOFS AND OTHER VISIBLE SURFACES

Look for signs of water damage for example water staining, damp patches, stains, mould or rotting timber; signs of insect attack for example rotting timber.

16 WATER TANK

Tank and pipes should be insulated to prevent freezing. Floor space under the tank should be free of insulation to let warmer air from the ceiling below to rise. Water tanks should also be covered. Consider replacing any lead pipes.

17 INSULATION

Should be a uniform minimum thickness of 100mm between the joists.

INSIDE

18 TOP FLOOR ROOMS

Check the ceiling and walls for signs of water damage for example, damp patches, stains or mould, caused by damage to the roof.

19 COMMON STAIR AND PASSAGES

Look for cracks developing between stair treads and uneven or excessive wear, loose or missing balusters or rails, cracked or loose plasterwork, broken or inadequate locks on main doors, broken or rotten stair windows, hollow sounding ground floor which may indicate subsidence.

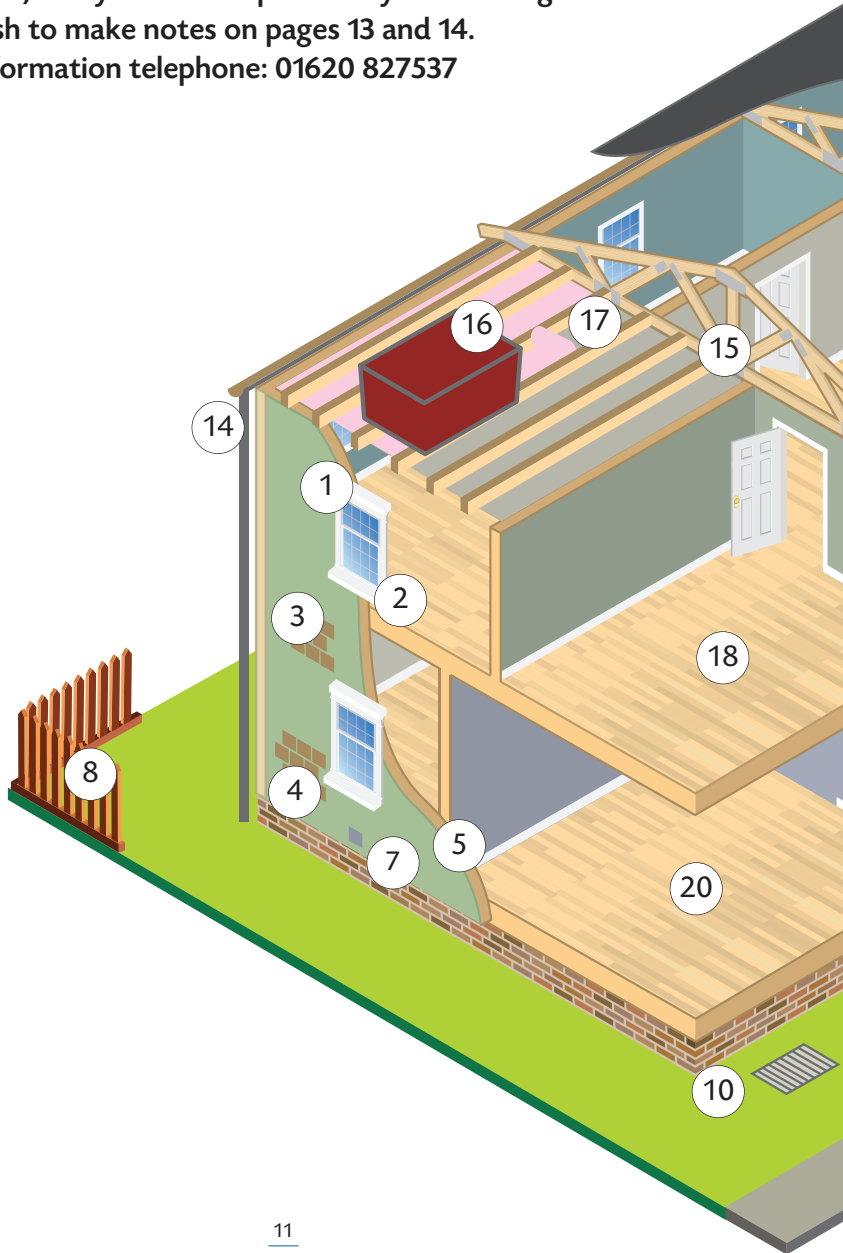
20 ROOMS WITH AN OUTSIDE WALL

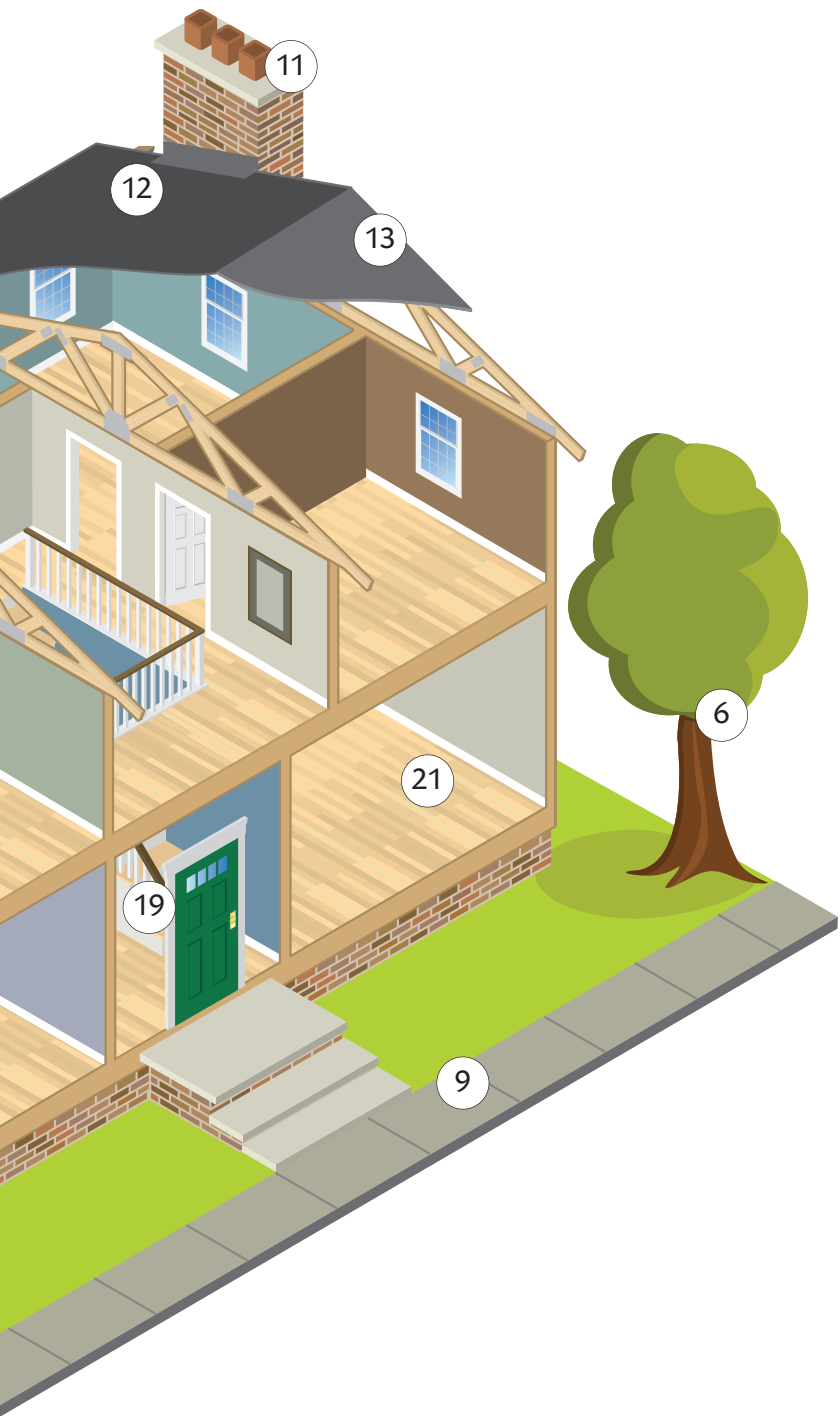
Check the walls for signs of water damage for example, damp patches, stains or mould, caused by damage to the external stonework or pointing.

21 ROOMS AT GROUND FLOOR OR BELOW

Check the walls for signs of water damage for example, damp patches, stains or mould, caused by damage to the external stonework or pointing or the damp proof course.

Use the information on pages 8, 9 and 10 and this diagram to establish what, if any work is required on your building. You may wish to make notes on pages 13 and 14. For more information telephone: 01620 827537





Your building checklist

EXTERNAL WALLS

- 1 Lintels
- 2 Cills
- 3 Stonework
- 4 Pointing
- 5 Bulges/leaning walls

AROUND THE BUILDING

- 6 Trees
- 7 Air vents
- 8 Railings and boundary walls
- 9 Paths
- 10 Drains and gratings
- 11 Chimneys
- 12 Flashings
- 13 Roof coverings
- 14 Gutters and downpipes

ROOF SPACE

15 Joists, rafters, joints between roofs and other visible surfaces

16 Water tank

17 Insulation

INSIDE

18 Top floor rooms

19 Common stair and passages

20 Rooms with an outside wall

21 Rooms at ground floor or below





Versions of this leaflet are available on request on audiotape, in Braille, large print or your own language.
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**Telephone: 01620 827537 (Monday to Thursday 9am-5pm
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Website: www.eastlothian.gov.uk/privatehousing

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