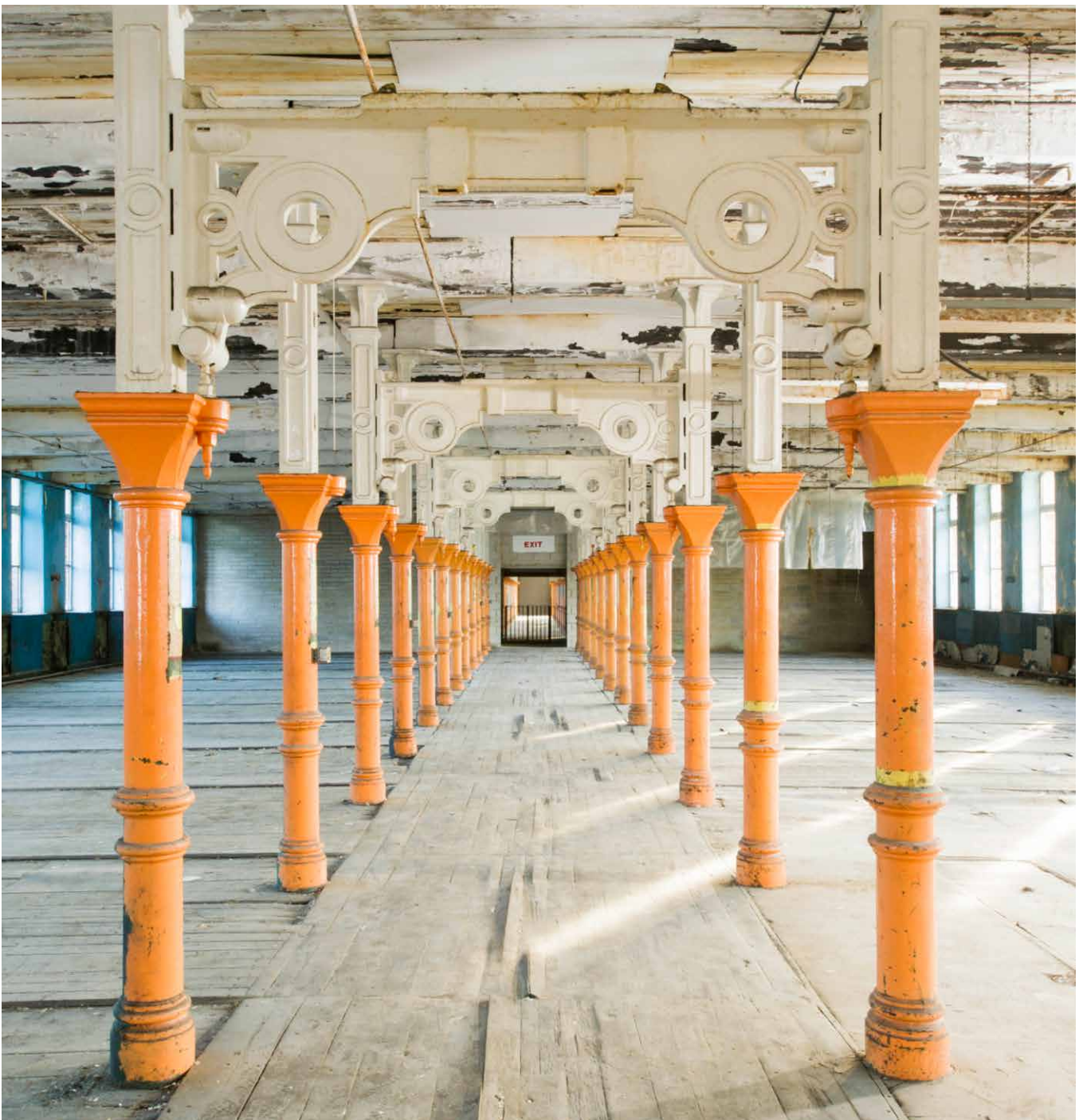




Historic England

# Vacant Historic Buildings

Guidelines on Managing Risks



# Summary

When historic buildings are left vacant they are at a greatly increased risk of damage and decay as well as being a potential blight on their locality. The best way to protect a building is to keep it occupied, even if the use is on a temporary or partial basis. It is inevitable that some historic buildings will struggle to find any use, especially in areas where the property market is weak and the opportunities for sale or re-use are limited. However, such buildings may become centrepieces of future regeneration and safeguarding will allow them to fulfil their social, cultural and economic potential.

This guidance is intended to help owners and purchasers of vacant historic buildings to reduce the risks by undertaking a range of precautionary measures and adopting an 'active management' approach that can prevent unnecessary damage, dereliction and loss of historic fabric. Owners will also benefit by maintaining the value of their assets and increasing the chances of bringing them back into permanent use. The guidance explains how to decommission buildings that are about to be vacated, as well as how to look after buildings that have already been vacant for some time.

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**Front cover:** Interior of Dalton Mills, Keighley.

A Grade II\* building on the Heritage at Risk Register but now undergoing a programme of repairs to bring it back into use.

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# Introduction

Unoccupied buildings are vulnerable to damage and rapid decay. This threatens not only their heritage interest and significance but can also jeopardise public safety. Damaged and derelict buildings are more difficult to bring back into permanent use and can pose an increased liability for their owners as well as potential costs arising from statutory action.

This guidance for owners and managers of vacant buildings describes the various steps that can be taken to reduce risks. [Section 1](#) considers the key information that needs to be gathered to inform future decisions about management, repair and re-use. [Section 2](#) looks at what urgent repairs might be required so that damage to the building fabric is minimised and future repair costs are reduced. [Section 3](#) considers what features of the building may need particular protection whilst the building is in a vulnerable state. [Section 4](#) and [Section 5](#) cover ways of minimising risks from vandalism, unauthorised entry and arson, as well as potential fire risks from works being undertaken by contractors. [Section 6](#) considers building services and also the environmental conditions in the building which if not adequately controlled can lead to rapid decay. Vegetation and wildlife can quickly take hold of vacant buildings and create problems, [Section 7](#) explores these issues. Buildings that are vacant need to be monitored and some basic maintenance carried out to prevent small problems escalating into major works. [Section 8](#) includes a checklist covering the types of issues that need to be inspected as part of a monitoring regime. [Section 9](#) looks at the issues associated with giving a vacant building a temporary use which can bring a number of benefits but also some risks. [Section 10](#) covers the wide range of

consents and regulations that can have an impact on vacant buildings. [Section 11](#) includes an arson risk assessment and finally [Section 12](#) gives details of further guidance and useful organisations.

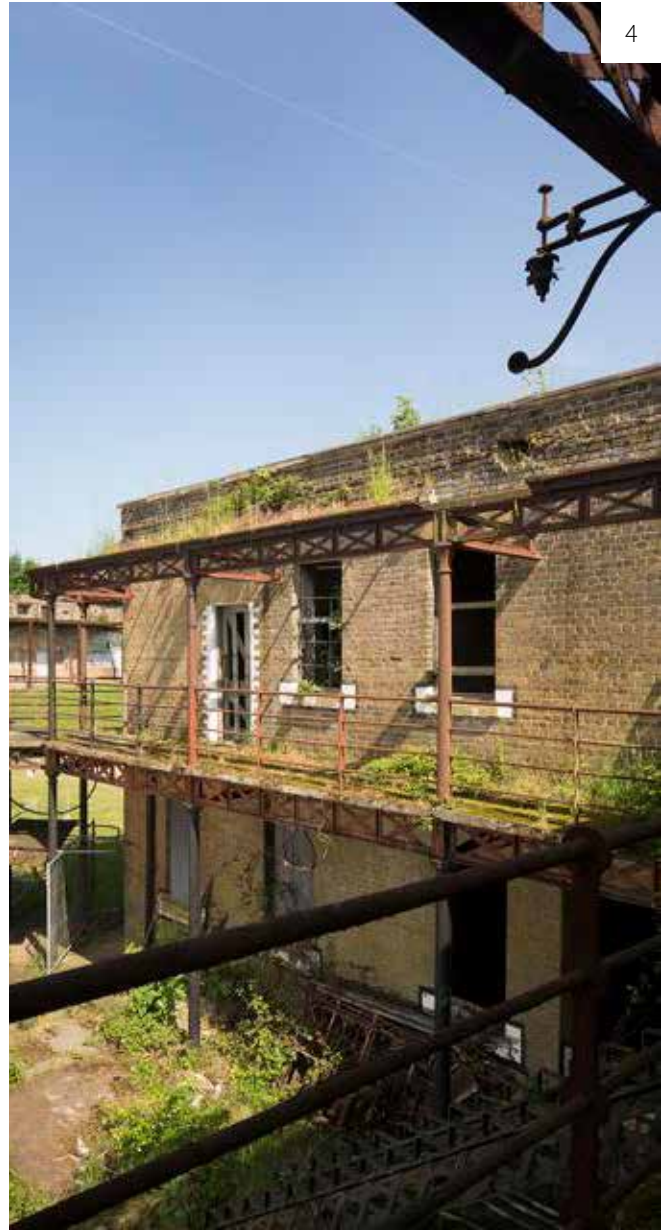
With careful planning, buildings are less likely to stand empty for indefinite periods and the period of vacancy can be kept to a minimum.

- Decide at an early stage whether the building needs to be retained or sold
- Be realistic about how long the building is likely to remain vacant
- Be imaginative about ways to re-use the building, either permanently or on an interim basis
- Use advisers who have relevant experience in dealing with historic buildings
- Keep options under review, taking into account market conditions
- Budget for managing and maintaining the building while it is empty
- Think about ‘mothballing’ as a last resort





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**Images 1-5**  
Unoccupied buildings are vulnerable to damage and rapid decay.

## Asset management

Any organisation will want all the buildings in its care to contribute to its economic success and operational capability. An 'asset management plan' will help to inform property investments, maintain cost-effectiveness and ensure that resources are allocated in the most effective manner. If a historic building is no longer required for its present use, it may need to be disposed of, either through sale on the open market or transfer to another owner. If disposal is not possible, a permanent new use or a temporary use should be considered.

### Asset Management Planning

The maintenance and repair requirements of heritage assets and their elements are assessed individually. The assessment takes account of a range of factors that will include statutory and legal requirements, significance, condition, original design and construction and any subsequent alterations, location, function, frequency and intensity of use. It is important that the survey process is able to capture all the necessary information in a consistent way so that work across the estate can be prioritised.

Alongside the survey and assessment of individual sites, a further essential requirement for an asset management planning system is the ability to store and manage data on current condition and required work. This enables detailed work plans to be quantified and costed and facilitates effective procurement and delivery of maintenance and planned repair works.

## Reasons for vacancy

Buildings can remain vacant for a variety of reasons, including:

- Where there is difficulty in letting or leasing the building, due to lack of demand from potential occupiers
- When there is a delay or difficulty in obtaining funds to repair the building to make it useable
- Where funding is not available to maintain a public service based in the building
- In an interval between uses, for example when the occupiers are being decanted from one building to another in the same ownership
- Where a development scheme is being prepared and there are delays due to acquisition of adjoining land, resolution of legal issues or securing finance

## Decision to mothball

If a historic building is to be left unused, it is beneficial to explain this decision to people who might take an interest in the building, such as local residents, former users, adjoining occupiers and special interest groups. This is particularly important for publicly-owned buildings. Being open about plans for the building can help to answer public concerns about its future and generate interest in finding a long-term solution.

## Investment appraisal

In considering investment decisions, it is important to take account of the costs, risks and legal responsibilities arising from leaving a building unmaintained and unsecured. Even a modest investment in security and maintenance can help to maintain the building's value and capacity for re-use. Overheads can include the cost of security, inspections, maintenance, building services, insurance and taxes. Timely intervention to keep a building in a stable condition will help to avoid the need for potentially expensive repairs at a later stage.

## Period of vacancy

The approach taken in managing a vacant building will depend on its condition and the length of time it is likely to remain empty (often referred to as a 'void period' by commercial landlords).

### Heritage at Risk

Historic England maintains a national register of Grade I and II\* listed buildings that are at risk from neglect and decay. Local authorities also hold their own separate registers of Grade II listed

'buildings at risk', which may also include unlisted historic buildings, especially those that lie within designated conservation areas or that make an important contribution to the overall rural or urban landscape. Historic England's main role in securing the future of listed buildings is to provide practical advice, guidance and resources to owners, local authorities and developers. Vacant historic buildings are likely to be categorised as being 'at risk', especially if they are in poor condition. An agreed strategy for mothballing may allow the risk category to be reassessed. Once a building is included on a register, it is likely to draw the attention of community groups, building preservation trusts and potential purchasers.

Grant aid may be available from Historic England for properties on the Heritage at Risk register. Support can be offered towards:

- Survey and investigation
- Work to help understand the building
- Assessments of potential for re-use
- Urgent repairs

Other grant-giving bodies may also be able to help. Most potential grant-givers will expect direct public benefits from their investment, so their criteria should be carefully considered before any approach is made.

Further information on grant giving bodies can be found in the Heritage Funding Directory

[www.heritagefundingdirectoryuk.org](http://www.heritagefundingdirectoryuk.org)

For more information on Heritage at Risk see our [website pages](#).



## Feasibility studies

Finding a suitable new use for an empty building is likely to need imagination and entrepreneurial flair. A feasibility study or options appraisal may be required to examine potential uses and sources of funding, including grants. When commissioning this sort of study, a detailed brief will be needed to ensure that the study provides the necessary answers and represents value for money.

Architectural input may be needed on ways of using the available space and professional advice on the cost and value of the options. Grants may be available to help towards the cost of project development.

## Community and charity projects

Community groups, building preservation trusts and other charitable organisations can tap into additional sources of funding and advice on raising finance for projects involving heritage assets. Guidance on the transfer of local authority heritage assets has been published by Historic England, including advice for community groups on project development and funding: [Pillars of the Community: The transfer of local authority heritage assets \(2015\)](#).

The [Architectural Heritage Fund](#) can be a useful source of advice and potential help with funding possibilities.

## Considerations when purchasing a vacant historic building

Taking on a vacant building requires a mixture of vision and pragmatism. Vision to see how the unique potential of the building can make for an exciting and distinctive place to live or work. Pragmatism is required to be fully aware of the costs, timescales and constraints of bringing a historic building back into use.

Good project management is often the key to success. Working out in detail the viability of a project through development appraisals and funding plans. Such studies need to be based on a thorough survey, undertaken ideally by architects, surveyors and engineers accredited in conservation.

Purchasing a vacant building in order to mothball it whilst awaiting an upturn in market conditions can be a valid way to conserve a historic building in the long-term but is not without risk. This guidance outlines the many issues that need to be considered when this approach is taken.

Purchasing a historic building in order to demolish it or just retain a part of it, for example its façade, is very difficult to achieve when the building is protected through listing or scheduling or is within a conservation area. Neglecting a historic building that is protected can lead the owner open to statutory action to improve the condition of the building and this may extend to the property being compulsory purchased. Where there is evidence of deliberate damage or neglect in the hope of making consent for demolition easier, national planning policy asks the local planning authority to disregard the deteriorated state of the building when determining an application. This is covered in paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

# 1 Understanding and Insuring the Building

Without reliable up-to-date information about a building, it will be more difficult to make informed decisions about its management, repair and re-use.

All the information that is available about the building, including scale plans, condition surveys, statements of significance and any features of special interest, as well as risk assessments and specialist reports need to be gathered to inform future decision making.

The following issues should be considered at the outset:

- The designation/significance of the building needs to be properly understood
- The condition of the building should be recorded and any risks assessed that make it vulnerable
- A photographic record of the building is made and kept
- The health & safety of the public, staff, advisers and visitors need to be considered at all stages
- The insurance cover should be checked as adequate and the insurers made aware the building is vacant

## 1.1 Finding information

Before commencing inspection, any available sources of information about the building should be consulted. For example, previous survey reports may yield valuable information about past repairs and maintenance issues. Historical information may be available in the local authority Historic Environment Record and information on listing or scheduling can be found on-line in the [National Heritage List](#).

Other sources of advice and information include the local planning authority and the national amenity societies that are concerned with historic buildings.

A better understanding of the significance will help to identify possible problems with the building fabric, and indicate priorities for recording and protection while the building remains unused.

Advice on the full range of techniques for recording, investigating and analysing historic buildings has been published by Historic England.

[Understanding Historic Buildings; a guide to good recording practice \(2016\)](#)

## Specialist technical advice

Having access to professional advisers who understand historic buildings is essential. This will involve selecting suitable consultants, unless the owner has access to in-house advice. Surveying the building and advising on its re-use will usually require the services of a chartered building surveyor or an architect.

There are systems of accreditation for surveyors, architects and engineers working on the conservation of historic buildings. Details of these schemes are available on the [Historic England website](#). Additional specialist advice may be needed on matters such as historical research, structural safety, building services, security, ecology and health & safety.

## 1.2 Commissioning a survey

In commissioning building surveys, owners should draw up a brief specifying what is required; for example:

- A schedule of the building's significant features
- An assessment of health & safety issues including any hazardous materials
- A report on the condition of the building
- A schedule of repair works
- Advice about the timing of the work, and the impact of delays
- Advice about the likely cost of works, that can be used to manage competing budget priorities
- Advice about procurement, including how best to select and engage specialist advisers and contractors

### Inspection and analysis

The building is usually inspected element by element, describing each in turn and assessing its condition. For vacant buildings the emphasis should be on parts of the building that provide protection from the weather, such as roofs, gutters and rainwater pipes, openings and drainage.

The building's condition, especially vulnerable elements, should be assessed against the risk of problems that may arise while not in use. The surveyor can then produce a prioritised schedule of repairs and temporary works to control and mitigate the identified risks. It may be necessary to seek specialist advice on matters such as structural safety, building services, security and fire risk, asbestos and ecology.



Image 6

A building is usually inspected element by element describing each in turn and assessing its condition.





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### Images 7-9

7. A survey needs to include below ground drainage as defective drainage can lead to settlement of the structure as well as other problems such as damp.
8. Leaks to the roof coverings need to be investigated so that temporary repairs can be put in place before major damage is done.
9. Badly maintained gutters and rainwater downpipes are a major cause of damage to vacant buildings.



## Health & Safety

The health and safety of anyone visiting the building, such as personnel carrying out surveys, will be particularly important if the building has been empty for some time. All visitors should be briefed on any risks, and should be accompanied, insured and accounted for.

It may be necessary to make provision for safe access through the building, including:

- secured ladders or temporary stairs
- plywood to cover voids and defective floors
- barriers to prevent access into unsafe areas
- scaffolding to shore unstable areas
- temporary lighting

Where appropriate, remove contents to leave spaces clear for safe access and inspection. Specialist cleaning may be needed to remove debris, bird droppings or other hazardous

materials before the building can be inspected. If no asbestos register exists for the building, commission a survey before carrying out any further investigative work.

Notices informing visitors about contact numbers, risks and what personal protective equipment is needed should be clearly visible. It may be useful to create a hazard map which can be displayed near the entrance to the site. This can be a simple floor plan, with highlighted areas showing specific risks such as unstable floors, stairs or ceilings. This should be updated as necessary during inspections and maintenance. Empty buildings are subject to the same health & safety regulations as construction sites.

The safety of the general public will also need to be considered if the building lies adjacent to a public footpath, highway or public right of way. Safety netting or scaffolding protection may be needed if there is a danger of fabric becoming loose or unstable.

Detailed advice on all aspects of health & safety in the construction industry is available from the [Health and Safety Executive](#).



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**Image 10**

Specialist cleaning may be required to remove debris, bird droppings or other hazardous materials before the building can be inspected.



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**Image 11**

Scaffolding may be required to shore unstable areas to make the building safe.

### 1.3 Recording

How long a building will need to be mothballed may not be known, and the people involved in decommissioning the building may have changed by the time it is put back into use. Recording the building at each stage of the project provides the continuity needed to reinstate the building. A full set of external and internal digital photos or video will provide an accurate, dated record of the building 'as existing'. These can be captioned and organized by sections or rooms and referenced to the condition survey. They can provide a cost-effective alternative to a full set of measured drawings if these do not already exist. A photographic record of the mothballing process should be kept, alongside a logbook in which all the action taken is detailed and dated.

It is advisable to compile an inventory of any fixtures, fittings or artefacts of historic significance, including decorative details, machinery and art works. It may be necessary to get specialist advice on how best to protect them. Paper archives of significance should be collated, labelled and transferred to a secure and environmentally-controlled store pending future assessment and recording.

Loose or damaged internal features, such as decorative plasterwork or internal joinery, should be protected, recorded and labelled so that as much of the historic fabric as possible can be re-used when the building is reinstated.



Image 12

A photographic record of the building 'as existing' should be made which is referenced to the condition survey.

## 1.4 Insurance cover

Insurers need to be notified as soon as the building becomes vacant. Vacant historic buildings have specific insurance requirements to cover risks to their special character and the risks associated with their unoccupied status. Adequate cover needs to be considered to allow for full reinstatement in case of loss or damage.

### Insurance brokers

Insurance of historic empty property is a specialist field, and it is advisable to appoint an insurance broker with specific experience. They will be able to give advice on reinstatement costs and the degree of cover required.

### Legal obligations

Insurance cover for historic buildings should allow for like-for-like rebuilding in case a property has to be partially or fully rebuilt following any damage. Under the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984, owners have a legal 'duty of care' to third parties on the site. This liability also covers any unauthorised persons accessing the premises. Public liability insurance will provide cover in the event of an incident. It will be necessary to demonstrate that adequate security and safety measures are in place to obtain this cover from the insurer.

### Restrictions in cover

Insurers usually impose restrictions in cover where buildings are left empty for extended periods. This may be partly mitigated by an agreed schedule of regular site visits and inspections. For vacant historic properties, cover will usually be on a 'restricted perils' basis.

This may include public liability cover plus fire, lightning, explosion and earthquake. Cover against risks such as theft or malicious damage is difficult to obtain on empty properties. A comprehensive risk-management strategy may help secure additional cover.

### Contractor's insurance

Owners should check that any contractor working on their building has adequate liability insurance. For substantial works this may be in the form of Contractor's All Risk (CAR) cover, also known as Contract Works Insurance.

### Risk management

Unoccupied buildings are particularly vulnerable to a range of risks including arson, burglary and vandalism. Careful assessment and management of these risks should help to secure lower insurance premiums. Comprehensive risk management might include loss-prevention programmes and site-specific fire safety policies. Proposed risk-management strategies should be discussed with insurers and specialist advisors in advance, to ensure that they meet the requirements of the insurer and the insured.



## Business rates and tax

Owners will need to clarify whether they are required to pay business rates or council tax on an empty property, or VAT on building works. Take advantage of any exemptions and discounts that are available. Inform the local authority as soon as the building becomes vacant.

Commercial properties such as shops, offices, warehouses and factories are subject to business rates. There are a few exceptions, including agricultural buildings and land, places of worship and church halls.

In order to gain any full or partial exemption from business rates, the local authority should be informed (usually in writing), if the property becomes vacant; they may wish to visit to confirm. The exemption is usually limited to the first three months that the property is empty. However, it may be extended for certain types of property:

- Industrial premises, such as warehouses, are exempt for a further three months
- Listed buildings are exempt until they become occupied again
- Properties owned by charities are exempt if the property's next use is likely to be wholly or mainly for charitable purposes
- Community amateur sports club buildings are exempt if their next use is likely to be wholly or mainly for a sports club

Exemption also applies to empty buildings below a set rateable value.

More information about business rates is available from the Valuation Office Agency and Business Link.

### Council Tax

If a domestic property is empty, an exemption or discounted level of council tax may apply.

Properties which may be exempt include:

- Property which is unoccupied and substantially unfurnished. The exemption applies for a maximum of six months and the property has to be vacant for the whole of this period (although up to six weeks of occupation during the period is allowed)
- Property which is vacant because it needs major repairs or alterations to make it habitable. The exemption applies for a maximum of twelve months whether or not the work is actually finished by then
- Condemned property

Homes that have been empty and unfurnished for longer than six months may get a discount of up to 50%.

### VAT

Work to an existing building will normally be subject to VAT at the standard rate. However, there are exceptions, including:

- As from 1 October 2012 VAT at the standard rate applies to all materials and services supplied in the course of approved alterations to listed buildings and scheduled monuments
- A reduced rate of 5% may apply to the renovation or alteration of a dwelling that has not been lived in during the two years immediately before work starts

However, alterations carried out for the purposes of repair or maintenance are always standard-rated, even if the work has been included in a listed building or scheduled monument consent.

Detailed advice on the rules which apply in these circumstances is available from HM Revenue & Customs – see [VAT Notice 708: Buildings and Construction](#).



# 2 Tackling Urgent Repairs

Vacant buildings are more likely to fall into disrepair and a delayed response to tackling repairs, however minor, may lead to irreparable damage to the special features that make a historic building significant. A delayed response can also increase costs in the future.

Consider the following issues:

- Prompt action can minimise repair costs
- Permanent repair may be cheaper in the long term
- Scaffolding can cause damage if not erected or dismantled correctly
- Gutters, gullies and drains need to be kept in working order and free from blockage
- Works required to maintain the safety of visitors and public

When working with historic buildings that are listed or scheduled, it is important to check with the local planning authority whether listed building consent or any other statutory permission is required even for temporary works (see [Section 10](#), Consents).

Where it has become clear that a listed building or a building in a conservation area is being allowed to deteriorate, the local planning authority can take action to secure repair through an 'urgent works notice'. The owner may be liable for any costs resulting from these works.

## Urgent works and repairs notices

Local authorities have legal powers to serve 'urgent works notices' and 'repairs notices' on the owners of listed buildings. These are served as a last resort when a listed building has been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that its future is at risk.

Urgent works notices are intended to secure urgent temporary measures such as works to keep a building wind- and weather-proof and secure against vandalism. If a building is at long-term risk of deterioration a full repairs notice may be served which will specify all the work needed to repair the building. In extreme cases where building owners have not taken reasonable steps to preserve a listed building, the local authority can do the work at the owner's cost.

Further information can be found in the Historic England guidance: [Stopping the Rot: a guide to enforcement action to save historic buildings \(2016\)](#)

## 2.1 Full or temporary repair?

Any vacant historic building is likely to need repair from time to time. Repairs may be long-term or temporary in nature and this will be determined by considerations such as the extent of damage, available funds and whether there is a clear plan for the building's future use. A full repair could be most cost-effective in the long term when costs such as access scaffolding are taken into account.

Owners should consider obtaining specialist advice from a chartered building surveyor, architect or engineer. However, if a full repair is not achievable then undertaking temporary measures to prevent further deterioration, making the building safe for inspection and allowing maintenance work to be carried out should be considered. With historic buildings, it is important that any temporary works should be easily reversible without causing damage to the historic fabric.

*“The principle of modern times is to neglect buildings first and to restore them afterwards. Take proper care of your monuments and you will not need to restore them. A few sheets of lead put in time upon the roof, a few dead leaves and sticks swept in time out of a water course, will save both roof and wall from ruin. Watch an old building with an anxious care, guard it as best you may, and at any cost, from every influence of dilapidation”*

**John Ruskin**

*The Seven Lamps of Architecture* 1848

## 2.2 Issues to consider

### Scaffolding and access platforms

Scaffolding may be needed for access, or as shoring to support parts of the building in danger of collapse. Scaffolding may also be required to provide protection to public areas from falling debris. The scaffolding will not be appropriate for all types of use unless specifically designed for the purpose. Care needs to be taken during the erection and dismantling of scaffolding as decorative features on historic buildings can easily be damaged.

Hydraulic platforms provide an almost instant means of access and are particularly useful for inspections and holding repairs. They are often referred to as ‘cherry pickers’ and have a working platform on an articulated telescopic boom. They can operate at considerable height and their good reach gives access to elements set back from the front line of the building. However they do require an access point sufficiently wide to accommodate the machine with fairly flat and stable ground.

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### Images 13-18

13. Temporary propping under an entrance to a fort on the Heritage at Risk Register.
14. Temporary shoring needs to be adequately designed. Lacks of ties and bracing make this shoring potentially dangerous and ineffective.
15. A portalised steel frame has been used to stiffen a timber framed structure and support the jetty. This design minimises the projection into the pavement and roadway.
16. A temporary repair to a cast iron roof truss to maintain structural integrity until a full repair can be implemented.
17. A temporary roof covering in place to protect the roof structure with netting to collect any slipping slates.
18. Hydraulic platforms, often referred to as ‘cherry pickers’, can be useful for detailed inspections and carrying out minor maintenance and holding repairs without the expense of scaffolding.





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## Keeping the building dry

Water ingress is one of the major causes of damage in historic buildings. Vacant properties are particularly vulnerable to damage from water as leaks can go undetected for long periods, which may lead to problems such as dry rot and other types of timber decay which can in turn lead to structural instability. Targeted investigation where deformation can be seen or where moisture is a known problem may be required to determine the extent of decay. Propping to a known stable point may be a temporary solution which can prevent structural collapse.



**Image 19**

Vacant buildings are particularly vulnerable to leaks which can go undetected for long periods. Such leaks can result in serious damage, as shown here to an ornate plaster cornice.

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## Roof coverings

A sound roof is the first line of defense against water ingress, and roof repairs should be a priority. The appearance of ceiling stains after rainfall may indicate that water is leaking into the roof space. A permanent repair is preferable but if this is not practicable, then a temporary repair will be necessary. Temporary repairs must always be made with materials that can be easily removed without causing damage to the historic fabric.

Roofing felt and battening may temporarily stop water ingress. Diversion of water away from vulnerable roof areas or walls may be possible by the use of metal sheets, tarpaulins, plastic sheeting or pipes to throw the rainwater away from the building. Care needs to be taken to ensure temporary measures do not in themselves cause damage by increased wind action on unrestrained elements such as roof tiles.



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### Images 20-22

20. A sound roof is the first line of defence against water ingress. If a full repair is not possible, a temporary roof structure may be needed which can be a significant expense.
21. A temporary roof repair using corrugated steel sheeting.
22. Felt and battens have been used here to protect this barn until a new roof covering could be put in hand.





#### Images 23 and 24

- 23. Bitumen felt has been used as temporary protection for this valley gutter and roof hatch.
- 24. Corrugated plastic sheeting used over leaking rooflights until they can be repaired.

### Gutters, downpipes and gullies

The building's rainwater systems need to be maintained in good working order. Neglect of rainwater disposal is one of the commonest causes of decay in historic buildings which can result in problems such as deterioration of masonry, dry rot or insect attack, winter frost damage, and saturation of plaster, render or cladding.

Gutters, downpipes and drains need to be kept free from blockages. A wire balloon placed at the junction of the gutter and the downpipe, with leaf traps on drains and gullies, will help to maintain the water flow. These should be checked and cleared at regular intervals. Below ground drainage should also be tested as prolonged leaks can lead to serious settlement problems.

#### Images 25 and 26

- 25. Leaking downpipes quickly saturate masonry which can lead to outbreaks of dry rot and many other problems.
- 26. Below ground drainage problems have resulted in ground settlement and the need for temporary propping to a window opening and brick arch.





**Image 27**

If plywood is used for boarding up windows as additional security, care should be taken not to damage the window frames and that ventilation is incorporated.

### Glazing

Vacant properties are vulnerable to damage from vandalism. If glazing gets broken, it should be replaced as soon as possible to prevent water penetration and to keep birds and other wildlife out. If plywood is used as a temporary measure or for additional security, care should be taken to ensure that no damage is done to the window frames when fixing it in place and that ventilation is incorporated. If there is a risk of arson or illegal entry, metal panels would be more suitable than plywood for securing ground floor door and window openings.

### Interior features

Roof or plumbing leaks, or attacks of vandalism may require a rapid response to prevent further damage and rapid decay of interior elements. Swiftly-installed temporary measures may reduce the cost of a delayed full repair.

Where elements such as floor tiles have become loose, it is preferable to lift and store them in a safe place until a full repair can take place as they can be a trip hazard. Small void areas can be filled with a naturally hydraulic lime mortar such as NHL2. Larger void areas will need a fillet of mortar applied to the edges of the remaining tiles to hold them in place whilst the damaged area is covered with protective plywood boards.

For internal wall tiling that is loose, the tiles can be taped on the wall across grout lines. Any fallen tiles should be collected labelled and put into safe keeping.

### Exterior features

The method of temporary repairs to delaminating wall cladding or other elements depends on its location and weight. Where tiles and bedding mortars have fallen or are at risk of doing so, the risk must be assessed and managed. This may mean closing access to the area below, possibly followed by photography and removal of material for potential reuse. Safety netting for small fragments or sloped timber decking may need to be erected to protect people and property below.

# 3 Protecting Features

Historic buildings often contain architectural and decorative features which contribute to their character, but which are vulnerable to damage or loss. This section describes methods of protection and the prevention of damage.

All significant, vulnerable or fragile features need to be identified and measures taken to protect them.

- Ensure visitors or workers are aware of the vulnerable features and how to decrease the risk of accidental damage
- Prevent access to non-essential areas
- Use physical protection such as boxing-in

The protection of any wall paintings is likely to require the input of a specialist conservator.

## 3.1 Understanding the risks

Historic features in empty buildings are likely to face risks such as damage or theft during building and maintenance works, unauthorised access, and changes in environmental conditions. Temporary protective measures can be taken to minimise or mitigate these risks.

Before any mothballing takes place, it is important to identify all significant, vulnerable or fragile features, assess them for repair, photograph and catalogue them.

Valuable loose furnishings and contents will probably be removed from a mothballed building for safekeeping. In exceptional circumstances it may also be necessary to remove some fixtures or fittings to protect them, for which listed building consent may be required.

Particular care is required to prevent accidental damage from scaffolding. The erection and dismantling of scaffolding must be supervised by someone who understands the vulnerability of the significant features. All scaffolding equipment brought into the premises must be clean and dry to reduce dirt and moisture. Ladders should never be leant against vulnerable surfaces.

It is important to make any contractors or visitors to the site aware of the vulnerability of significant features of the building. Adequate information should be provided on those elements which are particularly fragile or significant, with a note of the steps that must be taken to protect them. Method statements should be agreed with contractors undertaking repair or maintenance. For example, this may include restrictions on 'hot works.'

## 3.2 Controlling access

All access to the property during repair or maintenance works should be carefully controlled and monitored. Where possible, close off any rooms that are not part of the works to reduce accumulation of dust and dirt or provide dust sheeting. Where access through a space containing vulnerable features is necessary, consider installing physical barriers to prevent accidental damage.



### 3.3 Humidity and ventilation

Vacant properties will usually have different environmental conditions from occupied buildings because of changes in heating and ventilation. Decorative finishes and joinery can be damaged by these changes, and measures should be taken to monitor and control these risks.

Any programme of works is likely to cause a change to the prevailing environmental conditions. As a great deal of deterioration is associated with fluctuating conditions, actions that could cause rapid or cyclical changes in humidity or temperature should be approached with caution. Measures must be set in place to watch for deterioration of significant features and address problems quickly should they occur.

If the roof or glazing is to be partly or entirely removed measures must be taken to prevent damage from rain, wind, frost and light.

### 3.4 Loose material

Decorative elements, fittings, fixtures, frames and other items that have already become detached from the building should be labelled to show where they were found, photographed, recorded on an inventory and stored in a secure location within the property. They should not be left lying around. Items that may be vulnerable to theft for re-sale on the architectural antiques market should be boxed or crated in a way that makes the contents invisible. They should be labelled only by inventory number and stored in a secure area where access is controlled.



**Image 28**

Important decorative elements such as these wall tiles, which have become detached, should be labelled and stored in a secure location within the property for re-fixing.

### 3.5 Physical protection

In some situations it will be appropriate to box-in vulnerable elements in-situ to prevent accidental damage and to deter theft. Plywood or chipboard provides the best protection against heavy impact damage. Fluted polypropylene board may be acceptable where impact risk is less severe. Padded spacers should be used between the element and the framework. Ventilation holes need to be provided to prevent moisture build up and mould growth. The fixings themselves must not be allowed to cause damage to adjacent historic fabric such as panelling, floors, or door and window surrounds.

#### Plasterwork

Plasterwork is vulnerable to water ingress, damp, and vibrations from nearby drilling and hammering. Unstable ceilings may need temporary support, particularly if cracks have appeared which are wide and continuous, or where one edge of a crack is lower than the other. Localised support to provide temporary fixing is preferable to plywood panels supported with props from the floor and separated from the plaster by underfelt or a similar soft material. This can cause more damage in the event of ceiling deflection or movement and obscure further inspection.



**Image 29**

This system of timber supports, with a breather membrane and insulation for soft padding, provides a crash deck which prevents collapse of an important plaster ceiling.



Localised support can be achieved in two ways:

- If access is available to the upper side of the ceiling the damaged areas should be restrained using padded battens suspended on strong wires secured to the joists.
- Where access from above is impossible the support battens can be fixed by screwing through the ceiling into the underside of the ceiling joists

These methods leaves the ceiling accessible for assessment and repair and do not obstruct the room below. Such work may need to be undertaken by a conservator who will be able to fix the supporting battens with the minimum of disruption.

Where there is significant instability in a ceiling or where partial collapse has already occurred, netting can be fixed to collect any pieces that might fall.

### Joinery and fittings

Timber features such as balustrades and panelling may be vulnerable to impact damage, especially when building works are in progress. Boxing-in of such features may be appropriate. Joinery in general is vulnerable to damp, which can lead to rot and insect attack. The effects of dampness can be significantly reduced by ensuring adequate ventilation within the property.

### Historic flooring

Floors and staircases in historic buildings, whether decorative or plain, can be significant and may contribute to the property's special character. During periods of extended vacancy, historic floors are more vulnerable to damage from fire, water ingress, changes in humidity, and accidental or malicious damage. There is also an increased risk of impact damage during building works. Risks can be mitigated by covering floors with sheeting, membrane or matting. Impervious materials should not be used on historic floors or staircases over long periods, as this can trap moisture and allow high relative humidity to build up.

### Chimneypieces

Historic chimneypieces are a prime target for thieves. As well as total loss, serious damage can be caused by attempted removal. Empty properties are most at risk from such theft, including during building works.

Chimneypieces should be photographed in detail, marked with an indelible ultraviolet marker or forensic coded traceable water and logged in an inventory. It may also be necessary to have them specifically itemised on the insurance policy. Fireplaces can be boxed-in fireplaces so they cannot be seen. Security screws need to be used to fix the panels with padding to prevent direct contact with the chimneypiece. Any framing should not be fixed to significant historic fabric. If it is necessary to identify the chimneypiece, it should be labelled with the inventory number only. It could also be fitted with its own dedicated alarm. It is important to provide sufficient venting within the central panel to maintain ventilation within the chimney stack.



#### Images 30 and 31

The boxing in of this fireplace is fitted with a security alarm and incorporates a hole to allow for visual inspection. The edges of the plywood sheets are padded to prevent damage to the adjoining surfaces.



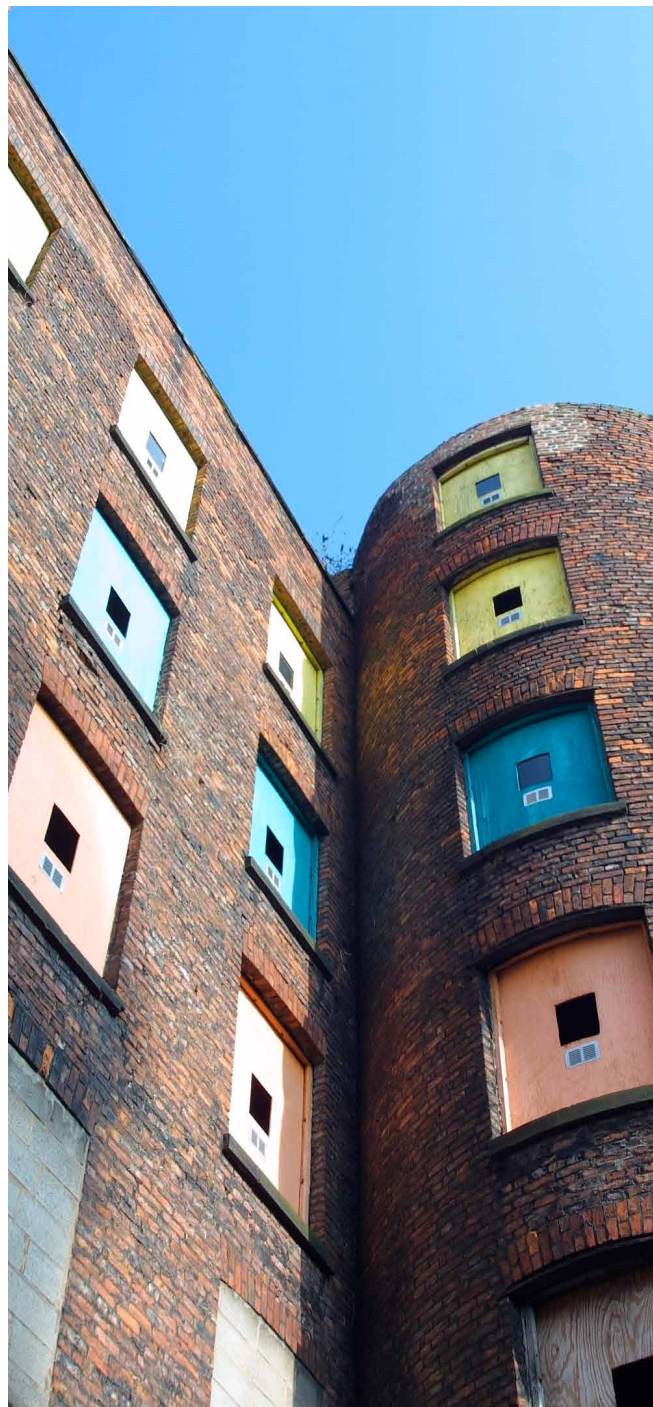
## Windows and glazing

Glazing in empty buildings is vulnerable to damage, whether accidental or malicious. Keeping the surrounding area free from debris will reduce the risk of vandalism. Glazing can also easily be damaged during scaffolding works. Broken glazing should be repaired as soon as possible to prevent water ingress and so the building does not look neglected.

Boarded-up windows usually look ugly and also draw attention to the building's vacant status. Unnecessary use of protection should be avoided, particularly on upper floors which can be seen from a distance and where unauthorised access is less likely. However, if damage is likely, or where glazing is of architectural or historic significance, physical protection will be needed. This could be galvanized or stainless steel mesh, expanded metal lath, perforated steel plates, acrylic sheeting or plywood panels. These can be attached to simple frames which can be wedged within the window reveals, or clamped using security bolts running through open windows to internal braces. Care should be taken that fixings do not damage the historic fabric. Adequate ventilation will be need to be maintained.

## External features

External features on an unoccupied site are at risk from vandalism and accidental damage. Vulnerable features might include finials, railings, gates and statuary or façade enrichments. However, protecting them may look unsightly, and may draw attention to the unoccupied status of the building. If physical protection is essential, external features such as statuary can be boxed-in using treated timber and exterior-quality plywood. Ventilation should be provided so that any moisture retention does not lead to mold or frost damage.



**Image 32**

During the wait for lottery funding, the windows of this large mill complex were boarded up and painted bright colours as part of a mothballing exercise. This made the building look cared for and attracted public attention.

# 4 Making the Building Secure

Vacant buildings are at risk from intruders who may cause deliberate or consequential damage. This can be reduced by good housekeeping and increased security.

Consider the following measures:

- Make the site and building as secure as possible
- Keep the surroundings tidy
- Carry out repairs to windows and hoardings promptly
- Consider security lighting/CCTV and intruder alarms linked to an alarm centre. Both installations would require specialist advice to make sure they are fit for purpose
- Arrange for regular building security checks

## 4.1 Security risks

Theft of re-saleable materials or abandoned equipment is a risk in vacant buildings. Historic buildings are also at risk from heritage crime such as:

- Theft of loose contents if not removed, such as artwork and furniture
- Theft of architectural features, like fireplaces, decorative joinery or cast-iron radiators. These elements may be unique to the building and irreplaceable
- Theft of building materials such as roof tiles or lead. As well as the loss of the historic material, this may leave the building vulnerable to water damage or intruders

Heritage crime is any offence which harms the value of England's heritage assets and their settings to this and future generations. Historic England together with the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service has set up the 'Heritage Crime Programme'. Each of these organisations has signed a memorandum of understanding that sets out their responsibilities for tackling heritage crime.

For further information see the Historic England website section on [Tackling Heritage Crime](#)

Other risks include:

- **Squatters** may take advantage of unsecured openings to gain entry. It may then be difficult to remove them. Squatters may cause damage to the property deliberately or accidentally and may delay plans for re-use.
- **Illegal activity** in vacant buildings may include storage of stolen property, illicit drinking, partying or drugs supply as well as squatting. 'Urban explorers' may also gain entry to photograph and post information on websites. Illegal entry is likely to increase the risk of other intruders even if no direct damage is caused. Illegal uses may give rise to insurance problems as well as putting the building at greater risk from vandalism.
- **Vandalism** may be gratuitous or may be driven by a grudge. Breaking windows or other damage may allow others to enter, leaving the building even more. Graffiti advertises the vacant status of the building and vandalism will often escalate if not dealt with promptly.
- **Arson** can cause major loss (see [Section 5 Reducing Fire Risk](#))

## 4.2 Security precautions

The security risks need to be assessed in relation to the particular location and ease of access, before deciding the security strategy. The local neighbourhood policing team (and if appropriate, any neighbours) should be told that the property is vacant, and informed of any particular security precautions such as timed lighting, and also of key holders and other contacts. Regular security checks by the caretaker or agent should be set, or a security company could be employed.

Where the building is obviously vacant, it may be helpful to leave a notice giving a contact telephone number to report any damage, or to allow queries for arranged access. Managed access through 'Heritage Open Days' or organised tours for interested parties may reduce the risk of unregulated intrusions by 'urban explorers'.

If the building is visible to the public, it needs to look secure and cared-for; maintenance of the external appearance can deter casual intruders. Well-chosen decorative treatment of any hoardings or boarding-up can demonstrate care and attention. Where the building is not so protected, internal lights on timing devices can make it look occupied.

Dealing with problems promptly, will help deter vandalism and intruders. Rubbish should be removed, and undergrowth cleared and vegetation kept tidy. Windows or hoardings should be kept in good repair. Graffiti should be removed promptly. Ladders or tools should not be left in accessible locations.



## Boundary security

Defence against crime or illegal intrusion starts at the perimeter of the site. Perimeter fencing will need to be maintained or improved; hoardings may be added, but these can screen intruders from view. Planning permission may be required. Overhanging trees or high hedges need to be kept trimmed to improve visibility and consider adding security lighting or CCTV. Security patrols may be appropriate.

Intruder alarms, lighting and CCTV can act as immediate deterrents and reduce damage as well as help to identify intruders. Existing alarm systems should be maintained, and connected to an alarm centre to ensure that the alarm is acted on. Changes may be required to the key-holder system. Where there is no existing alarm, a temporary alarm system can be installed, even when all services have been disconnected.

Detailed advice can be found on CCTV, alarms and manned security on the [National Security Inspectorate website](#) and the [Historic England Heritage Crime webpages](#).



### Images 33-35

33. This hoarding showing archive images describes this vacant building's association with its railway heritage.
34. A decorative hoarding copying the main architectural elements which lie behind it.
35. The use of a metal sheet hoarding provides a robust and resilient protection to these vacant historic shop frontages.

## Building security

The building should be examined for accessibility from all sides, including roofs and basements (a slim person or child can get through a hole as small as 230x230mm). Anti-climb paint on painted rainwater pipes will protect vulnerable roofs or upper windows (but should not be used on unpainted leadwork or historic cast iron). Warning signs are a legal requirement where anti-climb paint is used.

- **External doors** should be secured with a good deadlock or key-operated security bolts, avoiding damage to historic joinery and retaining any historic locks. Any external doors/cellar flaps not required for access (or means of escape during inspections) should be fixed shut. If the door is not robust it may be preferable to leave it fixed open and install a new security door across the opening to avoid damage.
- **Windows** may be fitted with blinds or curtains to conceal the interior, and existing shutters should be closed. Boarding up or adding grilles to easily-accessible windows may be considered (being careful not to cause damage during fixing). Wedge-fitting or securing boarding through an open window avoids damage to joinery. Vulnerable historic glazing can be boarded up or fitted with wire-mesh guards.
- **Internal doors** should not be locked, so they are not broken down by intruders. Any keys should be labelled and put in safe storage rather than leaving them in the door. Decisions on leaving the door open or shut will depend on the fire strategy and the need for air movement.
- **Scaffolding** access should be restricted by the use of an exterior grade plywood hoarding with no gaps between the hoarding and the ground. All lower level ladders should be removed. The scaffolding can be protected by an alarm system in accordance with the NSI Code of Practice for the design, installation and maintenance of scaffolding alarm systems (NCP115).



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### Images 36 and 37

36. Broken glass needs to be repaired or rapidly secured.

37. Vulnerable openings such as this one has been secured by the means of a temporary steel grille.

# 5 Reducing Fire Risk

A large proportion of historic buildings damaged by fire are empty or disused. Such buildings may not conform fully to current standards for fire-resisting compartmentation and may be at greater risk than modern buildings to the damaging effects of fire, with potential loss of irreplaceable heritage.

If a fire starts in a vacant building it is less likely to be noticed at an early stage and there is therefore a greater risk of major damage. Precautions against the start and spread of fire are vital, together with an appropriate detection system and management strategy.

The risk of fire and fire spread can be reduced by considering the following:

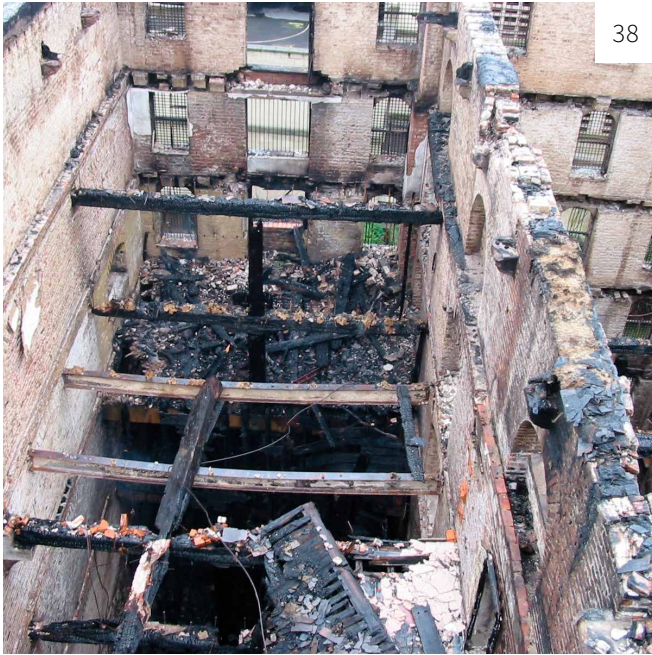
- Keep the site tidy and secure to deter arsonists
- Disconnect faulty or non-essential electric circuits
- Maintain fire-detection and intruder-alarm systems and link to a call centre
- Ensure that contractors and short-term users follow relevant safety procedures
- Liaise with fire services and amend fire strategy as necessary

## 5.1 Causes of fire

The majority of fires in vacant buildings are caused by arson or fire-setting by minors. The building owners may be prime suspects if it is thought that destroying the building would allow demolition and redevelopment.

- **Arson and fire damage** from intruders are significant risks in vacant buildings. Arson or fire-setting may be due to a personal grudge or just be opportunistic. Accidental fire damage may also be caused by squatters or intruders lighting fires. Flammable materials should not be left around that could be used by arsonists. Good housekeeping, such as keeping the building site clear of rubbish and vegetation, and keeping windows and hoardings in good repair, will help to deter vandalism and intruders. Ladders, tools or flammable liquids/gas canisters should not be left in accessible locations. Letterboxes and other voids large enough for fireworks should be sealed up. Good security will help to prevent attacks.
- **Electrical faults** are also a risk; any freestanding electrical equipment should be removed, and where practical, services including gas supplies cut off to avoid fires caused by faulty wiring. Fire and intruder alarm circuits must be kept live. Electrical services and lightning protection should be checked and maintained in good condition.





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### Images 38-41

- 38. A large proportion of historic buildings damaged by fire are vacant.
- 39, 40. Arson is a major cause of fire in disused buildings but measures can be put in place to reduce the risks.
- 41. Contractors working on vacant buildings need to make sure risks are kept to the minimum as many protection measures such as compartmentation may be incomplete or missing.



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## 5.2 Contractors and temporary users

Fire risks are also higher when temporary occupants are not aware of the precautions in place, or if building works are not properly controlled.

- **Contractors** must make sure that any work follows relevant safety measures including 'hot works' procedures. The use of high-risk elements such as halogen lamps or blow torches should be avoided. Buildings in the course of alteration must not be left vulnerable to fire due to incomplete protection measures or storage of flammable materials. Smoking should not be allowed for contractors or visitors.
- **Short-term use licences** must cover additional fire risks to avoid uncontrolled open fires and unsafe practices such as the use of portable heaters or ad-hoc extension of electrical installations.

## Tackling arson

Tackling the problem of arson and associated anti-social behavior is a shared responsibility. Local authorities, police and fire and rescue services collaborate with a range of organisations to deliver effective Community Safety Partnerships.

Historic England has been working with Community Safety Partnerships across the country to integrate the prevention of heritage crime, including arson, into local plans and strategies. A number of areas have introduced Heritage Watch schemes that seek to involve local communities to prevent crime, and where offences do occur, to identify and bring offenders to justice.

Further information on arson prevention can be found in the publication: [Arson Risk Reduction: preserving life and heritage in the North West](#)

## 5.3 Fire protection

The owners of vacant as well as occupied commercial buildings have a responsibility to carry out a fire risk assessment as required by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The risk assessment needs to consider the building inside and outside particularly for arson risk if the building is vacant. A named 'responsible person' is required to carry out the assessment and any resulting management issues. The assessment should be recorded and periodically reviewed particularly if there are changes to the situation. It is important that a contact list and emergency lead are in place for buildings that are vacant.

Where the assessment indicates that there is a high risk of arson or malicious damage, levels of both security and fire protection will need to be improved.

A simple risk assessment template is included in the [Appendix](#). More detailed guidance on risk assessments to prevent arson can be found in [Section 12](#).

### Passive fire protection

Passive fire protection works by containing fires so that they cannot spread. Doors and shutters in compartment walls should be able to withstand the effects of fire for the same period as the walls themselves.

Arson is commonly started by posting burning materials or flammable liquids through letter boxes and proprietary products are available that can help reduce this risk.

For vacant buildings boarding up ground floor windows and doors with perforated metal sheeting may be preferable to plywood boarding which might be used in an arson attack.

- The fire load should be reduced by removing flammable furniture and furnishings. Vacant buildings should not be used for the storage of flammable items. Small fires in bins or outbuildings can quickly spread and engulf the whole property.
- Compartmentation (fire separation) should be reinstated if breached by vandalism or accidental damage. Additional temporary compartmentation may be advisable to create protected zones or to protect important elements, particularly in roof voids. Fire doors should be kept shut (but not locked). The need for cross ventilation should be assessed and, if necessary, automatically-operated closers on holdback devices installed to allow fire doors to remain open

### Active fire protection

Active measures such as fire alarm and detections systems may need to be considered particularly where a vacant building has some form of temporary use. These may already exist from when the building was fully occupied.

In a vacant building with no occupancy, the detection will give some property protection, but break-glass call points will have no-one to operate them. The weekly test of call points will therefore not be required until the property is re-occupied. Fire detectors should receive their normal testing and servicing to ensure that they remain operable. Existing detection systems should be maintained, and alarm systems could be upgraded to include a direct link to a call-receiving centre. Where there are no systems in place, radio detection can be fitted with minimal installation damage.

An adequate water supply should be available for fire-fighting and the location of the nearest fire hydrants should be established. Any retained fire extinguishers or sprinkler systems must be properly maintained. Background heating may be required so that pipes do not freeze. For premises with highly significant elements in remote locations and considered at high risk of fire, the addition of automatic fire suppression systems should be considered.

## 5.4 Fire management

Even where the possible response time is short, fire services will always give precedence to life safety, and so a fire in a vacant building may not be high priority, which increases the risk of major loss. Liaison with the local fire and rescue services will establish response times and likely fire management. Where response time is likely to be lengthy, it may be possible to set up an estate fire team or local volunteer service.

- Any historic building should have an emergency response strategy in place identifying items of particular significance and vulnerability. When a building becomes vacant this information is particularly important. If the building contains significant items left in situ, the fire services should be made aware and a salvage strategy put in place.
- Access arrangements should be agreed with the local fire service. Vehicle turning facilities and fire hydrants should not be obstructed by hoardings.



# 6 Considering Services and Environment

A decision is needed on whether to maintain, decommission or close down existing services, or install new ones. The strategy will vary depending on how long the building will be vacant.

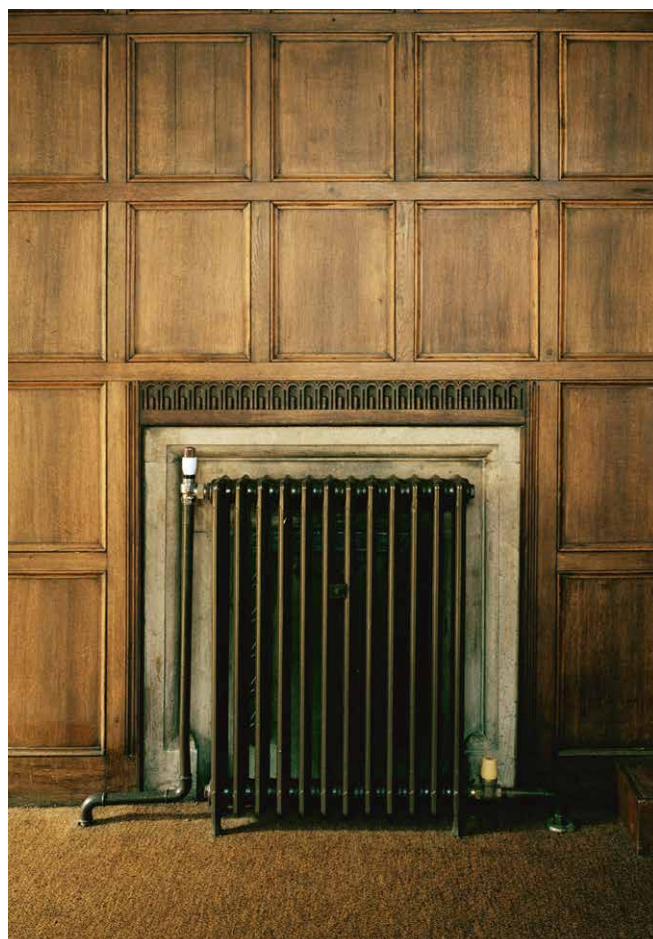
A managed approach to services is required to avoid damage and unnecessary expense. The following issues need to be considered:

- Some systems may need to be kept running to protect the building
- Decommissioning and recommissioning of services should always be carried out by a competent person
- Some building services systems are historic in their own right, and specialist advice should be sought
- When re-occupying a building, heating should be re-introduced gradually

## 6.1 Existing services

A full inventory and risk assessment of existing services should be carried out as part of the mothballing process. This should look at the likely impact of failure of a system, and what mitigation can be put in place. The insurer's policies will influence the action taken, as will any leasehold arrangements.

A building may have historic building services systems that are of interest in their own right and form part of the historic character and listing of the



**Image 42**

A full inventory and risk assessment of existing services should be carried out as part of any mothballing process.

building. Advice should be sought from a specialist adviser or mechanical services contractor before altering or closing down these systems.

## 6.2 Options for closure

Each building should be treated on its own merits, but an overriding factor for building services is the length of time that a building is likely to be vacant. If the building is to be closed down temporarily then a policy of 'lock and leave' might be all that is needed.

However, if the building is to be closed for a longer period, these options might be considered:

- Drain down and disconnect
- Keep some systems and circuits running to protect the building
- Remove systems

### Disconnection of services

Shutting down building services may be the most appropriate option for small buildings. In general, where building services are to be disconnected or isolated this should be done at the perimeter of the building. In all cases, it is essential that the water supply is functional for the purposes of fighting fire. Where a supply is disconnected, it should be carried out in such a way that an intruder cannot reconnect it. Draining large water tanks (or refilling them) may have a structural effect on the building.

### Keeping some systems running

A combination of lighting, security, fire detection, background heating or mechanical ventilation may be needed to keep the building in good order while vacant, and the owner's insurance company will have an interest in ensuring that some of these systems are operational. If there is no fire or intruder alarm system, it may be necessary to install them.

The objective is to avoid extremes of cold that could lead to freezing pipes, or excessive humidity that can result in condensation, mould and timber decay. Keeping heating systems operational can therefore help to protect the fabric of the building. However, over-heating the building must also be avoided, as this can cause timber to shrink and crack.

Any systems remaining in use during the period of vacancy should be inspected regularly by a qualified person. The inspection frequency may be dictated by insurance company requirements. Where systems are not to be maintained, existing maintenance agreements may require a six month notice period of termination in some cases.

### Removal of systems

This approach might be appropriate where it is anticipated that the building will be empty for a long time, and the existing systems are already ageing or obsolescent, and likely to be replaced in due course. Care should be taken that items of historic interest, such as cast-iron radiators, are not removed inadvertently.



Image 43

Care should be taken with services of historic interest so that they are not damaged or removed inadvertently.

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### Reconnection of services

Where a building has been vacant for an extended period, water ingress or rodent damage may have made electrical cabling unsafe. Mechanical ventilation may have rusted or seized. All building services should be thoroughly inspected by a competent person before reconnection.

Where heating is being reintroduced to a building which has been vacant for a long time, damage may be caused if the internal environment changes too quickly. Vulnerable features such as wall paintings, joinery and plasterwork may suffer cracking and damage if they dry out too rapidly. A specialist conservator may need to be consulted.

## 6.3 Providing ventilation

There is a trade-off between achieving sufficient ventilation within a building to ensure that problems such as dry rot do not develop, and maintaining the building in such a way that the risk of break-in or the spread of fire are not increased. Each building will present its own set of risks.

Historic buildings are usually well-ventilated because of the nature of their construction, with open flues, sash windows, suspended floors, and open eaves. This ventilation may be reduced when a building is being closed down, but good air circulation must be maintained to keep the building free from condensation and reduce the risk of mould, rot and pest infestation.

Using passive 'stack' ventilation is the most cost-effective means of ventilating the building. This is achieved by creating cross-ventilation at high level, drawing moist air up through the structure. Trap doors and internal doors should be kept open (as long as this does not increase the risk of the spread of fire), chimney flues swept and windows fixed partly open.

Other possible measures are:

- Introducing proprietary ventilators at eaves level
- Removing floor coverings such as carpets
- Lifting floor boards where they abut an external wall, to increase air circulation and prevent moisture tracking into the building

Poor ventilation and dampness can accelerate the process of building decay. Ensure that humidity levels are controlled and consider the following:

- Maximise ventilation without compromising security
- Seek specialist conservation advice where there is important historic plasterwork, finishes or timber

- Use mesh to ensure that birds, bats and vermin cannot get into the building through openings

- Where rot or infestation has occurred, stop the source of damp and allow the building to dry out. Professional advice can then be sought about remedial repairs

### Timber decay

Damp timber is especially vulnerable to rot or insect attack, particularly in vacant buildings where water leaks can go undetected for some time. It is vital that regular inspections check for water ingress so that it can be rectified quickly.

- **Dry rot** can develop in timber if the area is damp and poorly ventilated. Regular inspections of the building should pick this up at an early stage (often detectable by smell). The first step is to stop the water leaks and improve ventilation to allow the area to dry out; dry rot cannot survive without a source of water. If there are hidden voids, some opening-up may be necessary to improve air circulation. Advice on treatment should be sought from a timber decay specialist, rather than a commercial timber treatment contractor, to avoid saturation of the walls with chemicals and the unnecessary removal of historic fabric which in many cases can be an overreaction to the problem.

- **Insect attack:** wood-boring beetles such as death watch beetle and furniture beetle attack timber weakened by damp. If there is evidence of timber decay (such as flight holes and dust), the first step should be to stop any sources of dampness and improve ventilation. However, where a building has been empty for some time, beetle infestation may have already caused significant damage to the strength of structural timbers. Specialist advice should be sought from a timber decay expert, and structural repairs may also be needed.



### Humidity control

A stable level of relative humidity and temperature is necessary to preserve internal features, fittings and structural elements. Where these are particularly fragile or important, specialist conservation advice should be sought to establish a stable internal environment

### Treatment of window openings

Where a window has been fixed partially open, it must not compromise the security of the building. Options for adapting windows when a building is mothballed are set out in [Section 3](#). Ventilation gaps should also be fitted with mesh to prevent access by birds.

### Mechanical ventilation

If passive ventilation is not sufficient to protect the interior of the building, mechanical ventilation may be needed. This can be controlled by a thermostat, timer or control which compares internal and external relative humidity. A building services engineer can advise on how to achieve the required level of ventilation.



**Image 44**

Ventilation levels can be improved by ensuring that internal doors are kept open as long as this does not increase the risk of fire spread.

# 7 Controlling Vegetation and Wildlife

Plants and trees are continually germinating, growing, dying and decomposing. Unmanaged, their effects can cause problems for an empty building.

Prevent expensive repair problems building up by regular monitoring and taking action to control vegetation.

- Keep gutters and gullies clear of leaves
- Monitor and remove woody-stemmed plants
- Keep trees and climbing plants under control

Empty buildings can provide a habitat for various animals, birds and insects. Many species are protected and licences may be required for any works which might affect them.

Prevent damage to the building and risks to human health from wildlife:

- Keep birds out of the building
- Wild birds and their nests are protected by law while being built or in use
- Layers of bird droppings are a toxic hazard and should be removed by a specialist contractor
- Consult Natural England as soon as possible if the building has bats, or any other protected species

## 7.1 Vegetation issues

### Gutters and drains

Leaves can fall or blow into gutters and block downpipes, causing rainwater to overflow or back up and leak into the building. Blocked drains can result in localised flooding and dampness. A build-up of dead leaves soon becomes a fertile bed for seeds, encouraging plant growth which can weigh down the gutters further and cause them to collapse allowing rainwater to run down the face of the building.



**Image 45**

A build-up of dead leaves and moss can block gutters and downpipes.

### Flat roofs

Fallen leaves gathering on flat roofs provide a potential seed bed for trees and shrubs to become established; their roots can exploit cracks in the covering and open up channels for water to get into the building.

### Walls

Where walls are in poor condition, plants can become established in decaying pointing or cracks. Small short-lived plants are harmless, but woodier herbaceous plants such as valerian and bramble can become damaging as they get older. All species of trees and shrubs establishing in walls will cause damage. This type of vegetation should be monitored and removed before damage can occur. Established roots (more than 10mm diameter) can force masonry apart and may allow a route for moisture into the wall as they grow or rot away.

### Trees and shrubs

On mothballed sites where grounds maintenance is reduced or stopped, trees and shrubs near the building may cause problems to develop, and some periodic maintenance is advisable to avoid a neglected appearance. Left untrimmed, branches can blow about in the wind causing damage to windows, walls and roofs. Growing roots seek water and may exploit broken drains and blocked gullies. Trees growing close to the building can damage foundations and even walls if they are allowed to grow too big. A building hidden behind trees and shrubs is more vulnerable to vandalism and other problems.

Trees may be protected either because they are in conservation areas or through Tree Preservation Orders. It is an offence to fell or carry out any work to a protected tree without permission. The local planning authority should be consulted well in advance of any works to trees which may be protected, and guidance is available.

### Climbing plants

When mothballing a site, climbing plants should be assessed. They are unlikely to damage walls in good repair, and may give some protection from the weather. However, unmanaged climbers can grow up onto roofs and into gutters, dislodging



46



47



48

#### Images 46-48

46. If tree seeds fall on roofs and get established their roots can exploit cracks in the covering and open up channels for roof leaks.
- 47, 48. Unmanaged climbers can grow up onto roofs and into gutters, dislodging roof slates and blocking rainwater drainage.

roof slates, and blocking rainwater drainage, and an obviously-overgrown building looks neglected. Defects may be hidden behind thick growth, and overgrown climbers blowing in the wind can cause additional pressure on fragile structures. Unless they can be regularly cut back, it may be worth considering removing them.



## 7.2 Wildlife

### Birds

All wild birds are protected. However, where birds are causing particular problems (such as to human health, but not for the protection of property), a licence may be authorised for control measures. Nests of wild birds are also protected while in use, and it may be necessary to programme works around the nesting season to avoid disturbing birds.

It is important to keep birds out of buildings because their droppings are highly acidic, and can damage historic materials. Where a building has been empty for some time, layers of droppings may have built up that can be dangerously toxic, and must be removed by specialist contractors to make the building safe to enter.

Ensuring there are no broken windows or open doors is usually enough to prevent birds getting into the building, and wire baskets fitted on chimney pots will prevent birds nesting in chimney stacks. However, many birds, such as pigeons, will use external sills and roofs, and preventing this (for example with netting, spikes, wire or gel) may be expensive and ineffectual. Killing birds is only permissible (under licence) if other methods have been found to be ineffective. Some birds, such as owls, have higher levels of protection and works excluding them may need a licence.



**Image 49**

Pigeons will try to enter vacant buildings. In doing so they can cause a lot of mess, which is a potential health hazard.

### Bats

All bats and their roosts are protected by law; unlike birds' nests, bat roosts are protected whether the bats are present or not. Unused buildings are likely to have bats already, so Natural England should be consulted as soon as possible, and specialist advice should be sought to determine the species and type of roost before any works are carried out. A licence will be required for any works that are likely to affect the bats.

It is illegal to block access to a roost. Usually, access is through tiny gaps which would not be affected by mothballing works, but it is important to ensure that access points such as open windows or doors are not blocked up in preparation for mothballing. Any changes affecting the bats would require a licence.

While bats may already be in parts of the building, such as the roof space, it would be prudent to prevent them from colonising newly vacated areas. It will be necessary to check buildings for the presence of bats before re-use.

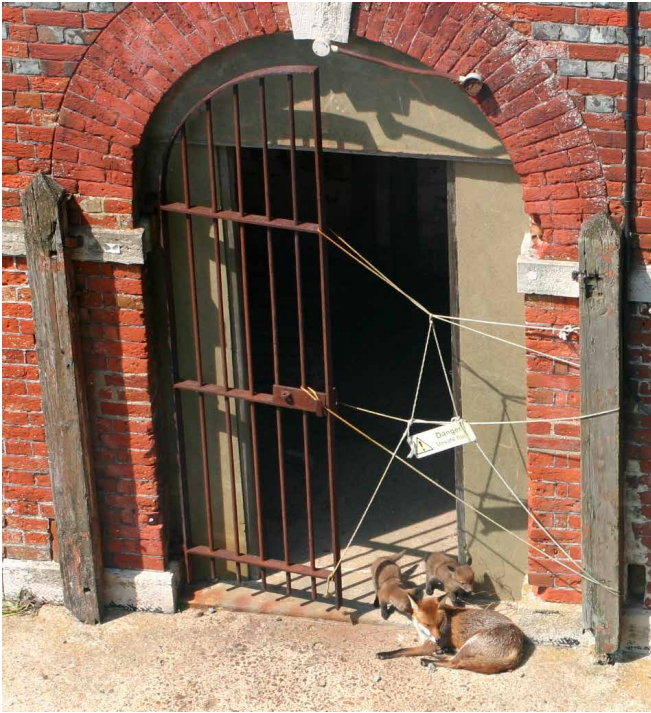
Bat droppings or urine may stain floors or furniture, and so protection of surfaces may be needed.

### Mice and rats

Rodents will gnaw through almost anything in search of accommodation and food. Apart from direct damage caused by gnawing, they will chew through cables and potentially cause fires. Although power may be turned off in unused buildings, this needs to be considered when re-occupying. Rodent droppings and urine may cause damage or health risks. Rats and mice are not protected, and humane control is legal.

### Squirrels

Grey squirrels sometimes get into roofs and may chew through cables. They are not protected, and humane control is legal. In fact, as a non-native species, grey squirrels caught in traps must be humanely killed; it is illegal to release them. Native red squirrels are rare and protected; in areas where both red and grey squirrels are found, only cage traps should be used, so that any red squirrels caught can be released unharmed.



**Image 50**

Foxes will use vacant buildings if they can get access and will cause mess and some damage. However, they will help to reduce any vermin.

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### Badgers

Badgers do not usually enter buildings, but on quiet sites may dig extensive underground setts near to buildings, disturbing foundations and archaeology. They are a protected species, and excluding them from a site would require a licence.

### Rabbits

Rabbit numbers may increase on unoccupied sites. Their tunnels (warrens) are unlikely to damage buildings, but can be extensive and a problem for archaeology and landscape. On the positive side, rabbits may keep areas of grass

short and free from self-set tree saplings. Rabbits are not protected and humane control is legal. Control may also be compulsory if surrounding farmland is being damaged.

### Insects

Wood-boring beetles are covered in [Section 6](#). Other insects are unlikely to be a problem in empty buildings. Very few are protected species and if these are present, are likely to be known about already.

Wasps sometimes make nests in roof spaces. Usually these nests do no harm to structures but can occasionally dislodge slates. The main concern with wasps is the interaction with people. The wasps leave the nest in late autumn, with a small number of queen wasps surviving the winter to form a new nest elsewhere.

Honey bees nest less frequently in buildings, but unlike wasps, the queen and a core of worker bees survive the winter in the same nest, to start the process again in the spring. Bees may react aggressively to a perceived threat to the nest. Honey bees are a valuable asset and local bee-keepers should be consulted and engaged to remove unwanted colonies.

Some species of masonry bees excavate short burrows in mortar or soft sandstone or limestone, in which to lay their eggs. They are 'solitary bees' and work individually. They are non-aggressive, but should be left alone where possible. If great numbers of bees use the same area, damage may become serious, and control may be needed. None of these insect species is protected.

# 8 Monitoring and Maintenance

As maintenance problems are more likely to go unnoticed in a vacant building it is important that there is an effective programme of monitoring and maintenance to keep the building in sound condition.

- Make someone accountable for the monitoring of a vacant building to ensure that sudden changes are noted and acted upon. A weekly walk-through will swiftly pick up on changes to the building
- Have a local key-holder who can be invaluable in an emergency
- Draw up a routine maintenance plan and make sure the work is done properly
- Keep a log of inspections, works and events

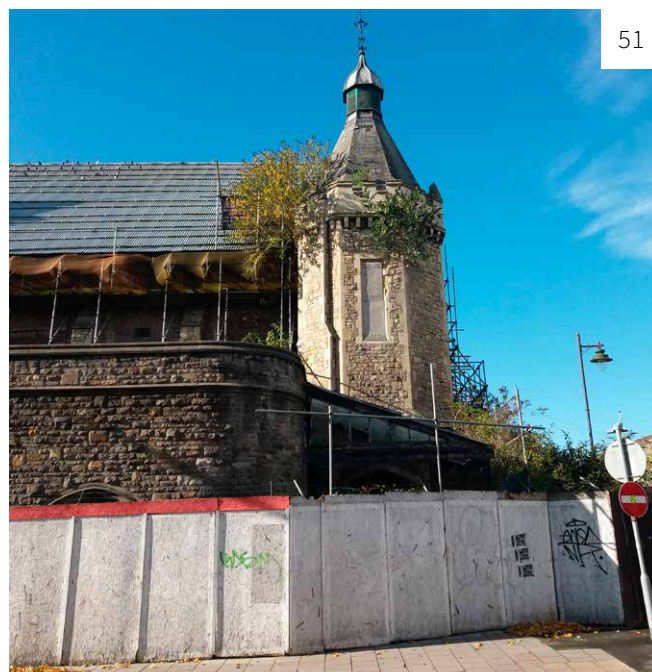
## 8.1 Monitoring

Wherever possible, a custodian or guardian should be appointed. This is an important role with responsibility for monitoring the building while it is empty, and photographing and reporting damage. The custodian or guardian should have responsibility for a logbook, which records all damage, incidents, call outs to emergency services, inspections or visits for repair and maintenance work.

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### Images 51 and 52

51. The condition of hoardings needs to be maintained and monitored along with vegetation growth.
52. This leaking rainwater pipe is causing significant damage but could be easily fixed with minimal cost.





If the building is unoccupied, a contact number should be displayed, so that a member of the public can report any damage witnessed. The support of a neighbour or local agent, who is aware that the building is vacant, and can be given a key to allow access for visitors, will speed up the response in an emergency. The local emergency services should be made aware that the building is vacant.

All visiting contractors must be made aware that the building is not in use and that they are the eyes and ears of the owner/manager while on site; the contractors need to be more vigilant than with a building in regular use. An immediate report should be made of any damage, evidence of pests or inappropriate use of the building.

## 8.2 Maintenance regime

A planned maintenance schedule should be drawn up, ideally in consultation with the surveyor who has inspected the building. This should note the circumstances and location of the building, and cover all building elements vulnerable to deterioration. It should identify the tasks, responsibilities and frequency for each element to be maintained. The maintenance plan should focus on preventing water ingress, controlling vegetation, securing access points and take into account seasonal fluctuations in climate.

Following any maintenance work, the custodian or a professional advisor should visit the building to ensure that the work has been carried out to a satisfactory standard.

## 8.3 Inspection and maintenance checklists

This table sets out two parallel checklists, one for use by the surveyor at the outset of the mothballing process and the other which suggests

tasks for inclusion in a planned maintenance schedule. Many of these are routine tasks which can be carried out by a guardian, caretaker, maintenance contractor or site-based staff. Where more specialist skills may be required, this is indicated in the table.

Building element	Inspection checklist	Maintenance checklist	Frequency
	<b>questions for the surveyor at the initial inspection</b>	<b>tasks to be incorporated into a planned maintenance schedule</b>	
<b>Boundary perimeter security</b>	Does the perimeter need to be reinforced with fencing or hoardings?	Check perimeter fencing, walls and hoardings	During routine visits
	Are walls and fences intact, with lockable gates and doors?	Carry out repairs to perimeter fencing, walls or hoardings	As required
<b>Vegetation</b>	Are the wall-heads structurally sound and free from vegetation?	Provide access equipment and get rid of vegetation at high level	Annually, co-ordinated with maintenance visit
	Are the bases of walls free from vegetation?	Clean site of debris and get rid of vegetation around the base of walls	Twice yearly
	Are there any trees and shrubs in close proximity to the perimeter or the building?	Clear invasive vegetation. Work to trees should be carried out by a competent person and may require permission from the local planning authority	Annually
<b>Roof coverings</b>	Do roof coverings, flashings, or weatherings need immediate repair? What is the estimated lifespan of the roof coverings?	Inspect roof from high-level access points and record and report any damage to roof coverings	Inspect roof from high-level access points and record and report any damage to roof coverings
		Check roof for slipped or missing tiles and refix or replace, matching existing. Replace or refix missing or lifted flashings. Make good cracked or missing mortar fillets	Twice yearly
		Check panels, joints and clips to sheet-metal roofs and make temporary repairs to cracks as necessary	Twice yearly
		Remove moss, leaves and other debris from roof coverings	Twice yearly
		Inspect bedding and jointing to ridge tiles and rebed or repoint as necessary	Annually
		Inspect condition of flat roofs and upstands. Make temporary repairs to splits and holes and ensure an adequate covering of loose aggregate	Annually

<b>Gutters, downpipes and gullies</b>	Is there evidence that walls are repeatedly saturated because of damaged rainwater goods?	Inspect rainwater goods from the ground and accessible high points and report any loss or damage	During routine visits
	Are the rainwater goods free from blockages when it rains? Are there any problems with joints, falls or fixings? Is the profile of the gutter adequately sized? Are hoppers and grilles fitted with baskets to prevent blockage?	Clear and inspect gutters, hoppers and gullies, checking falls and joints to gutters. Lift and clear wire balloons, grilles, duckboards. Clear leaf guards	Twice yearly
		Inspect rainwater goods for cracks and leaks. Repair or replace any cracked sections. Adjust falls if necessary	Twice yearly
	Is the discharge of rainwater to ground adequate - grilles in good order and clear of debris? Similarly with foul waste - are channels running clear? Is there a drain survey/plan of the site or should one be commissioned?	Open up inspection chambers. Check that gullies and gratings are clear. Rod and flush storm drains	Twice yearly
<b>External walls</b>	Is there any evidence of structural movement to the walls?	Inspect external walls from the ground and report any damage such as spalling or delamination, or signs of movement or staining	During routine visits
	Where there are suspended floors, are airbricks and other ventilators exposed or should external ground levels be lowered?	Clear airbricks and other ventilators, check mesh over flues and other openings, check bird netting	Annually
<b>Scaffolding</b>	Are any parts of the structure, internal or external, in need of shoring or scaffolding to protect the structure and visitors?	Check any scaffolding for structural integrity	Twice yearly and after high winds
<b>Health &amp; safety</b>	Are floors and stairs intact? If not, are suitable measures and notices in place to prevent visitors accessing unstable areas of the building? Are hazardous materials present?	Check that the hazard map is up-to-date as well as personal protective equipment requirements	During routine visits
<b>Windows and glazing</b>	Draw up a schedule of window openings and types so that suitable ventilation/protection screens can be made and fitted.	Replace broken glazing or board over as a short-term measure	As required
<b>Vulnerable features</b>	Are there vulnerable or significant features that need physical protection? What condition is joinery in? Is plasterwork dry and in good order?	Check that boxing-in and other protective measures are performing adequately	Annually



<b>Internal environment</b>	Are there signs of water ingress internally or evidence of penetrating or rising damp?	Inspect internal structure and fabric and report on any signs of structural movement or of damp, rot or wood-boring insect activity	During routine visits
	Are basements and cellars dry and free from debris?		
	Are roof spaces well-ventilated and free from debris? Is any daylight visible, indicating that repairs are necessary?		
	Is there mould indicating high humidity levels?		
	Can the smell of dry rot be detected?		
	Are there any draughts moving through the building?		
	Are any opening-up measures needed to assist drying out or facilitate ventilation?		
	Are there any open flues which will assist with ventilating the building?		
<b>Security measures</b>	Do entrance doors need to be reinforced with additional locks or hinges? Do windows have adequate locks?	Check operation of ironmongery and lubricate as necessary Check security of locks	Annually
	Is an intruder alarm installed and regularly maintained?	Check alarms, CCTV system, external lighting Check battery packs to surveillance equipment	At intervals specified by the supplier
	Are the grounds in good order, with no hazards obstructing access?	Carry out grounds maintenance Clear any debris	During routine visits
		Remove graffiti	Immediately
<b>Fire Precautions</b>	What are the potential fire hazards and what mitigation is in place against the spread of fire?	Check that the fire strategy is up-to-date	Annually
		Arrange for inspection and testing of fire extinguishers, alarms and sprinkler systems by a specialist contractor	Annually
		Check internal/external spaces are free from combustible material and signs of fires having been lit	During routine visits

<b>Wildlife</b>	Is there evidence of pests or vermin?	Check voids for signs of vermin and remove	During routine visits
	Are birds nesting in attic spaces? Is specialist cleaning required? Are openings at roof level blocked or covered with mesh? Have measures been taken to prevent access by birds? Are suitable measures in place to deter roosting birds?	Inspect roof voids and other enclosed spaces  Remove bird droppings and other debris	During routine visits  Annually
	Is there evidence of protected species such as bats?	Check for signs of bats	During routine visits
<b>Building services</b>	Are historic services systems and equipment present which will require specialist attention?		Annually
	Is there a lightning protection system in place?	Inspection of lightning conductor by a specialist	
	Electrical system: what is the age and condition of the installation? Is the distribution board in a secure location?	Maintenance inspection of oil/gas/ electrical supply	Annually (insurance companies may have specific minimum requirements)
	Is any of the pipework vulnerable to freezing?	Check that all exposed water tanks and pipes are protected against frost	Annually
	Plumbing system: what is the age and condition of the system? Where are the water-supply stopcocks?	Inspection of plumbing system	Annually
		Turn stop valves on/off to ensure they operate	Annually
	Heating system: what is the fuel type? Are the controls adequate to enable background heating to run below a certain temperature? Could the controls be tampered with by an intruder or are they secure? Where are tanks/cylinders located? Are they vulnerable to freezing?	Inspection of heating system	Annually

# 9 Finding a Temporary Use

Owners often underestimate the length of time a property might be left empty. A temporary use can bring several benefits, including an improved prospect of attracting a permanent occupier. Until a permanent solution is found, keeping the building occupied through temporary uses will help to minimise the risk of unauthorised access, physical decay and sudden damage.

Consider:

- The costs and risks of leaving the building unoccupied compared with the benefits of a temporary use
- The full range of possible uses, including ‘meanwhile’ uses for socially-beneficial purposes
- Using a commercial service to arrange a temporary use or guardian for your building
- The potential risks of a temporary use and how to mitigate them
- If planning permission, listed building consent or other consents are required
- The use of a ‘Meanwhile use lease’

## Meanwhile use

‘Meanwhile use’ is a term used to describe the temporary use of vacant property for a socially-beneficial purpose. It has become more widely practiced since the Meanwhile Project was established on the back of the Government’s report *Looking after our Town Centres* in 2009. ‘Meanwhile Space’ is the delivery arm of the Meanwhile Foundation, set up to enable community uses of vacant property and sites. It provides a range of tools, such as special leases.



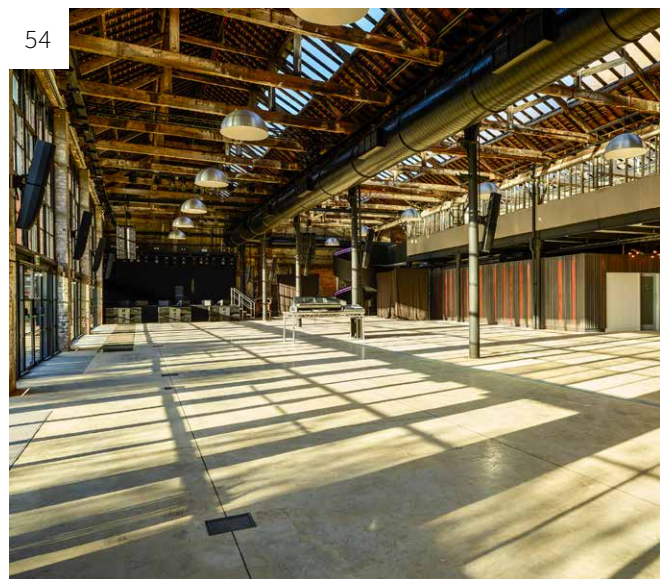
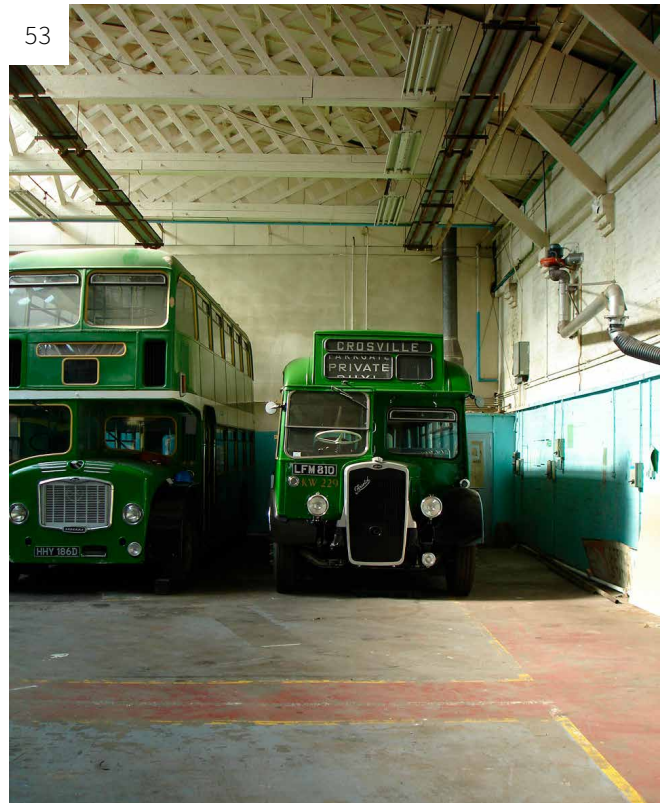
## 9.1 Types of temporary uses

An empty building may be suitable for a wide range of temporary uses, such as:

- Residential accommodation
- Retail, including charity and ‘pop-up’ shops
- Community activities such as exhibition spaces and information points
- Craft studios and workshops
- Art exhibitions, performances, hospitality and events
- Storage
- Filming

### Advantages of temporary uses

Property owners usually incur ongoing costs once a building is vacant including business rates on empty space, building insurance, and the costs of maintenance and security. Together with the ‘opportunity cost’ of potential income lost because the property is out of use, it means that there is nearly always a real cost to doing nothing.



### Images 53-55

53. This hangar building listed Grade II\* has long span Belfast-truss roofs providing large clear spaces. The central hangar is secured and weathertight and has generated income as a storage facility.
54. This large open space once housed Robert Stephenson’s locomotive works but fell into disuse and became at risk. A temporary use as a venue for food and music events proved so popular that it has since become fully developed as a multi-disciplinary arts and music centre called the Boiler Shop which is part of the Stephenson Works.
55. Although this church was in a poor condition awaiting major repairs, services were held in a protected temporary enclosure, within the nave.

Granting a temporary licence or lease for temporary occupation by a third party has a number of advantages for the owner:

- Improved security – having an occupier will actively discourage vandalism, or even squatting
- Less risk of decay – any maintenance problems are more likely to be reported and can be dealt with quickly
- Increased prospect of a sustainable use – ‘meanwhile’ uses can make the space more attractive and vibrant, and increase awareness of the property; this will allow prospective tenants to see the building in use and make it easier to attract long-term occupiers
- Lower costs – responsibility for paying insurance costs, business rates or utility bills will usually pass to the tenant or occupier

### Commercial services

There are several commercial services available that find short-term occupants for otherwise empty buildings. The aim is to provide low-cost accommodation and some protection against the risks noted below. The company providing the service will expect the occupants to exercise normal levels of care for housekeeping, safety and security, but there are no guarding or attendance responsibilities. Where the temporary use is residential and the occupants are in employment, there will be no expectation that the premises will be occupied at all times of day.

Alternatively, some commercial companies offer a house-sitting service and install occupants in empty buildings as live-in guardians, under a temporary occupation agreement. These are marketed as security solutions to property owners. Guardians are selected to live in the properties under a licence agreement, and are expected to look after the property. The owner has to pay a small weekly fee, but this is usually much less than paying for 24-hour security.

### Short-life housing

This is usually a not-for-profit arrangement where the building owner gives a licence for people to live in the property on low rents. Short-life housing schemes are usually operated by housing co-operatives or housing associations that manage the property and handle letting arrangements. Occupants are offered either a short-term tenancy or a licence to occupy. Arrangements usually allow the owner to have vacant possession on an agreed period of notice.

## 9.2 Issues raised by temporary use

Owners will need to ensure that their property is cared for to an agreed standard, and to have full vacant possession at relatively short notice when a sustainable use becomes viable again. Basic facilities such as temporary toilets may need to be installed.

In addition, the following issues should be considered before any agreement is signed:

- Unfamiliarity with the building can lead to bad practices, such as the blocking of fire exits and the obstruction or removal of firefighting equipment
- The temporary nature of the use can give rise to poor housekeeping and unsafe practices, such as the use of portable heaters and ad-hoc extensions of the electrical installation
- Fire safety arrangements and means of escape must be adequate for the use of the building, whether this is temporary or occasional. The local fire service should be contacted for advice
- Special care needs to be taken when allowing film or TV companies to use vacant premises, as the building may be damaged by their activities unless carefully-drafted conditions of use are agreed
- It may be necessary to check whether the structure can withstand increased loadings, for example, from storage use

## Reducing the risks

Having assessed the risks of a temporary use, take suitable precautions:

- Check whether planning permission is needed for any change of use; if any works to the building are required, these may need Building Regulations approval or listed building consent. A 'Certificate of Lawfulness' might be considered (see [Section 10](#)).
- Notify insurers immediately prior to the intended occupation, with full particulars of the proposed temporary use and the period of the lease or licence
- Carry out reference checks on the proposed user (commercial agents for temporary accommodation will do these as a matter of course); additional security checks may be necessary
- Record the condition of the building immediately prior to the intended occupation, so that any changes or deterioration can be accurately documented
- Draw up a schedule of any valuable or vulnerable features in the building, including features of historic interest that require special care
- Specify the occupants' caretaking obligations, and the amount of time that they will be required to spend on site
- Explain to the occupants any restrictions arising from the historic character of the building – for example, certain areas or items may not be painted or re-decorated
- Agree arrangements for the owner to access and monitor the building throughout the period of temporary occupation
- Ensure that illegal, unsafe or hazardous practices are not introduced and that the terms of the agreement are being adhered to
- Check the building when the temporary use ends and inform insurers about any change in circumstances

## 9.3 Agreements

A form of agreement should be drawn up which ensures that a temporary occupier does not become a protected tenant. Expert advice is needed in the wording of the agreement, but it need not be a lengthy document. It should clearly state the expectations and obligations of both parties and specify which repairs, if any, are to be carried out and by whom. Such an agreement must be accompanied by a degree of trust and understanding between the owner and the occupier, because legal action would be time-consuming and expensive.



# 10 Consents and Regulations

Vacant properties are covered by a wide range of legislation and regulations that govern building works, health & safety and wildlife.

It should be noted that:

- The owner's legal responsibilities do not end when a building is vacated
- Sufficient time should be allowed to obtain any statutory consents that are required, such as listed building consent or scheduled monument consent
- The owner is responsible for the safety of all visitors, both authorised and unauthorised, under the Occupier's Liability Act

## 10.1 Legislation affecting building works

### Listed building consent

Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, consent is required for any works of demolition, alteration or extension to a listed building that would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest.

Temporary works are not exempted from this. It is important to ask the local planning authority whether listed building consent is needed. If in doubt, a written schedule of works should be provided.

Examples of work that might need consent are:

- The temporary removal of any features of historic interest for security reasons
- The installation of security cameras
- Temporary changes in materials (for example PVCu replacement gutters or downpipes)
- Opening-up works for investigation purposes

It may be necessary to agree a method statement with the local planning authority to ensure that temporary protection is carried out in a way that does not damage the building, for example by agreeing methods of fixing. As a general principle, any temporary measures should be carried out in a way that allows the building to be reinstated to its original form and appearance at a later date.

Minor repairs are unlikely to require listed building consent if the work is carried out using the same materials and like-for-like techniques and they do not affect the special interest of the listed building.

Since 2015, 'Certificates of Lawfulness' can be applied for from the local planning authority. Under this procedure specific works can be judged to require listed building consent or not.

The certificate is legally binding and avoids confusion on what is and isn't unauthorized work. This can be particularly useful when the ownership of the building is being transferred.

### Scheduled monument consent

The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 requires that Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) be obtained for any proposed work to scheduled monuments, including repairs and temporary works and new uses. Historic England administers SMC applications, and detailed guidance is available on the [Historic England website](#).

### Building Regulations

Building Regulations approval may be needed for structural or emergency works where the building might be considered dangerous.

- Section 77 of the Building Act 1984 enables local authorities to deal with buildings it considers dangerous, and can require the owner to make a building safe
- Section 78 of the Building Act 1984 deals with emergency works and enables the local planning authority to take steps to deal with a building that is in a dangerous condition. However, if reasonably practical they are to give notice to the owner their intention to exercise these powers
- Section 79 of the Building Act 1984 deals with ruinous and dilapidated buildings and neglected sites which may be detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood. This allows the local planning authority to serve notice on the owner to execute repair or restoration works

It should be noted that for listed buildings under Section 56 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, local planning authorities should consider using their powers under section 47 ( compulsory acquisition ) and section 48 (repairs notice) under the 1990 Act before taking steps under section 77 or 79 of the Building Act 1984.

- Section 29 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 allows local authorities to carry out works to an unoccupied building to prevent unauthorised entry or to prevent it from becoming a danger to public health
- Sections 79-81 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 allow local authorities to require abatement of statutory nuisances that might include accumulations of rubbish or dampness from empty buildings. An abatement notice is served on the owner; if the notice is not complied with, the local authority can carry out works in default

## Health & Safety legislation

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issues guidance on assessing and managing risks during construction work.

The relevant regulations and legislation include:

- **The Working at Height Regulations 2005:** The HSE gives guidance on preventing trips and falls in the construction industry.
- **The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012:** The HSE has published a 12-step online guide to managing asbestos. This takes duty holders through the process of understanding their duties as defined in Regulation 4 of the regulations.
- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005:** When a building is to be vacated, the insurer must be informed, and a risk assessment undertaken in compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, either by the owner or an agent, with measures taken to reduce risk of fire and intrusion. This may require improved security and protection (see Section 5).
- **Occupiers' Liability Act 1957 & 1984:** The Occupiers' Liability Act covers the owner's duty of care to the public and the requirement to maintain the site so that it does not become a hazard or danger. This includes preventing unauthorised access or use, either by trespassers or children. Authorised visitors should be warned about risks such as structural defects, contamination, fragile roofs or floors, or razor wire, and sites should be provided with adequate lighting and barriers around unsafe areas.
- **Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999:** Employers are required to make risk assessments for people working in empty buildings, such as surveyors carrying out periodic surveys.

- **Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015:** Identifies the health and safety roles and responsibilities of all those involved in a construction project from initial design through to completion and beyond.

## 10.2 Legislation relating to vegetation and wildlife

- **Tree Preservation Orders:** A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) may be made by the local planning authority under the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations (1999) to protect specific trees or groups of trees from damage or destruction. Permission is required from the local planning authority for any felling or work to protected trees. Trees in a conservation area are also protected.
- **Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981:** The Wildlife & Countryside Act is the main legislation covering the protection of wildlife, particularly bats and birds and the designation and protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
- **Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010:** These regulations cover the protection of habitats and species at a European level and give additional protection to a number of individual species, particularly bats.
- **Protection of Badgers Act 1992:** This Act deals specifically with the protection of badgers, not because of rarity, but to prevent cruelty to this species.



# 11 Appendix

## ARSON RISK ASSESSMENT

Address of building: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of building: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment carried out by: \_\_\_\_\_

### Aim

The main focus of the assessment will be for Responsible persons to use their experience and knowledge of their premises to put measures in place to prevent an Arson attack. This proforma will assist in the production of an Arson Risk Assessment for the building (including external access). The conclusions of the Arson Risk Assessment will also contribute to the reduction of unauthorised access and use of derelict buildings by persons who may be causing a disturbance or committing anti-social behaviour.

### Site considerations - four point action plan

#### 1: Deter unauthorised entry to the site

- Is there restricted access to site by means of security fencing etc?
- Are warning signs used?
- Is there a neighbourhood watch/ security patrol?
- Is good lighting provided?
- Are random security patrols carried out?

#### 2: Prevent unauthorised access to the building

- Are alcoves and recesses gated or illuminated?
- Doors and windows maintained with adequate security especially those out of view (tinned or boarded if un-occupied)?
- Is access to roof restricted, internal grill bars fitted to vulnerable roof lights etc?
- Is CCTV in use?

### 3: Reduce the opportunity for an arsonist to start a fire

- Have all combustibles been removed from the periphery of building?
- Are refuse containers in a secure compound or secured with a padlock no less than 10m from the building?
- Are systems in place to keep the periphery of the building free of combustibles?
- Are Police aware of empty property to provide visual presence when in the area?

### 4: Reduce potential for fire damage

- Where they cannot be removed are combustible items positioned clear of windows / doors should a fire occur?
- Is the building fitted with a fire/security alarm with an auto-dial?
- Are all internal doors closed at night to limit fire spread should a fire occur?

## Initial assessment

	Observations	Actions
Deter unauthorised entry to site		
Prevent unauthorised access to the building		
Reduce the opportunity for an arsonist to start a fire		
Reduce the potential for fire damage		
Is there past history or evidence of vandalism?		
Have there been previous fires at the building or the immediate area?		
Is there evidence of attempted entry into building by unauthorised people?		
Is there evidence of Anti-social behaviour within the surrounding area?		

## Action plan

Action	Responsible person	Date for completion	Complete Y/N



# 12 Where to get advice

## 12.1 Further reading

### Understanding and insuring the building

English Heritage (2008) *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*

Historic England (2015) *Pillars of the Community: The transfer of local authority heritage assets*

Historic England (2016) *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice*

### Tackling urgent repairs

Practical Building Conservation:

This series of fully illustrated books published by Routledge provide detailed guidance on understanding, deterioration, assessment and care and repair.

- Basics (2013)
- Building Environment (2014)
- Concrete (2013)
- Earth, Brick & Terracotta (2015)
- Glass & Glazing (2012)
- Metals (2012)
- Mortars, Renders & Plasters (2012)
- Roofing (2013)
- Stone (2012)
- Timber (2012)

[www.HistoricEngland.org.uk/PBC](http://www.HistoricEngland.org.uk/PBC)

Historic England (2016) *Stopping the Rot: a guide to enforcement action to save historic buildings*

### Securing the building

National Security Inspectorate website.  
[www.nsi.org.uk](http://www.nsi.org.uk)

### Reducing fire risk

RISC Authority/Fire Protection Association (2010)  
*Risk Control Arson Prevention: The protection of premises from deliberate fire raising (RC48)*

Fire Protection Association (2007) *The selection and use of electronic security systems in empty buildings*

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service/Historic England (ND) *Arson Risk Reduction: preserving life and heritage in the North West*

### Considering services and environment

The Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE) Heritage Group may be a useful source of advice regarding early building services and their significance.  
[www.hevac-heritage.org](http://www.hevac-heritage.org)

### Controlling vegetation and wildlife

English Nature/Barn Owl Trust (2002) *Barn Owls on Site: A Guide for Developers and Planners*

Mitchell-Jones, A J (2004) *Bat mitigation guidelines*. English Nature

National Trust (2001) *Wildlife and Buildings: Technical Guidance for Architects, Builders, Building Managers and Others*. National Trust

Bullock D.J & Ferneyhough J, (2013) *When Nature Moves In - a guide to managing wildlife in and around buildings*. London, National Trust

English Heritage/National Trust/Natural England, (2009) *Bats in Traditional Buildings*

Bat Conservation Trust  
[www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)

Barn Owl Conservation Trust  
[www.barnowltrust.org.uk](http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk)

# 13 Acknowledgements

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