

Explain, educate, enforce – how to keep the windows right

Replacement windows are one of the greatest threats to the character of historic buildings and their settings. This is particularly true of historic, architecturally sensitive planned housing developments, where there is a consistency of detail which visually links properties together into a larger composition. The alteration of a single house in a terrace or group diminishes the whole.

On the Suburb, external changes to properties are controlled by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust. Historically, alterations were controlled under the leasehold powers of the landlord, and this had ensured the protection of the character of the area throughout its first 60 years. In 1967, the Leasehold Reform Act was passed, enabling tenants to purchase their freeholds. This raised concerns among Suburb residents that newly enfranchised homeowners would be able to make alterations to their properties without the control of the landlord, resulting in damage to character.

The Trust was set up in 1968 with the aim to 'do all things possible in order to maintain and preserve the present character and amenities' of the Suburb. The Leasehold Reform Act enabled landowners to set up Schemes of Management to control alterations to enfranchised

properties where there was a real threat to the character of an area of special interest. The Trust's Scheme was approved by the High Court in January 1974. Essentially, all external alterations to properties come under its control. The Trust does not differentiate between front and rear facades, or whether an elevation is visible from street or public space, but the Scheme insists that consent is not unreasonably withheld.

In addition to the Trust's powers, the London Borough of Barnet designated the Suburb a Conservation Area in 1968, and approved an Article 4 direction in 1971. The Trust works closely with Barnet, and design guidelines were jointly produced in 1994. These are sent to all new residents informing them of their responsibility to maintain the appearance of their house and obtain Trust consent for alterations.

The pressure for replacement windows

Double-glazing is a hard-sell industry, and many householders currently find themselves being pressured into considering replacement windows – often with misleading claims for their effectiveness. The sales pitch maintains that old windows inevitably need renewing, new products will improve the thermal performance of the

house, increase its value and are maintenance-free. PVCu frames are usually the only product offered, and most people are not aware that alternatives are available. The Trust does not approve PVCu windows.

Trust advice to residents is that original windows, well maintained, should not normally need to be replaced. Traditional windows retain the value of the house, particularly in an area where house prices reflect the high quality environment and where authentic detailing is appreciated. We encourage owners to repair their original windows and use draught-stripping and secondary glazing to upgrade thermal performance. Helpfully, the Local Authority has agreed to a relaxation of Part L of the building regulations within the Conservation Area so that any replacement windows need not meet the Government's standards for heat loss.

However, the Trust does not oppose double-glazing in all cases. It takes a pragmatic line, balancing the protection of the special environment with the understandable desires of residents to improve their houses. In fact, the Trust did experiment with PVCu in the early 1970s. After only a few installations, it was realised that the resultant character change was not sustainable. A few of these windows remain as a reminder that only exact replacements are appropriate in almost all cases.

There is a mix of window styles throughout the Suburb, including timber casements and sashes, timber frames with steel openers and leaded lights and, from the 1920s and 1930s, steel windows with either Georgian or Modern horizontal glazing bars. It is possible to get acceptable double-glazed replacements for some styles. Of course, the original Suburb architects would deplore the fakery of applied

leading and stick-on glazing bars, and these are not approved.

Leaded windows cannot be double-glazed and sealed units with applied lead strips do not accurately reflect the appearance of traditional leaded lights, with their varied reflections. However, in some cases, the Trust will approve double-glazed steel windows with plain glazing. One company we deal with can supply steel windows with a silicon exterior seal which looks similar to a puttied window (although the depth of the glazing bar is reduced because of the extra thickness of the sealed unit). Double-glazed timber windows are less successful because thick glazing bars are usually needed for the units, and applied glazing bars make the window reflections look rather flat. So, replacement timber windows are generally single-glazed.

The Trust maintains lists of joiners, steel window manufacturers, leaded light makers and other suppliers to help residents source the right product. Guidance is always available from the Trust Architectural Adviser, who can visit and advise on condition, repair and replacement.

Infringements

If inappropriate replacement windows are installed, inadvertently or in defiance of the Trust, an Infringement is placed on the property. This infringement is recorded as a charge against the property and must be made known to potential purchasers. The Trust would be unwilling to approve further alterations to the property until the infringement is rectified.

In general, residents understand the need to retain authentic architectural detail and there are few cases of inappropriate window installation. However, the PVCu replacement window industry continues to leaflet the Suburb, so educating residents on the maintenance of traditional detail is an ongoing task for the Trust.

DAVID DAVIDSON



Keep off the daffs

The picture captures a thief who appears to be removing a quantity of daffodils from the green adjacent to Widecombe Way. This is a frequent occurrence by some residents in the area who do not seem to be aware, or even care, that if caught stealing Barnet Council's property they will end up in court with a conviction against them for theft.

Kaye Morgan, a member of the HGS Neighbourhood Watch steering committee, and whose home overlooks the green, said, "It took a long time for the council to plant daffodils on the green and they do look beautiful. It's such a shame that people living nearby think it their right

to pick them. A couple of weeks ago I saw a grey haired woman filling two plastic bags with daffodils before disappearing in the direction of Monarch Court.

"Last Friday a woman ventured out in the pouring rain to grab some daffodils for her weekend flower arrangements. The deed done, she made a speedy retreat under her umbrella up Widecombe Way. I managed to get to the green in time to stop the person in the red anorak from stealing more and was greeted by a foreign accent telling me she didn't understand. But, when I pointed out that she was stealing – she fled complete with flowers."

KAYE WATSON

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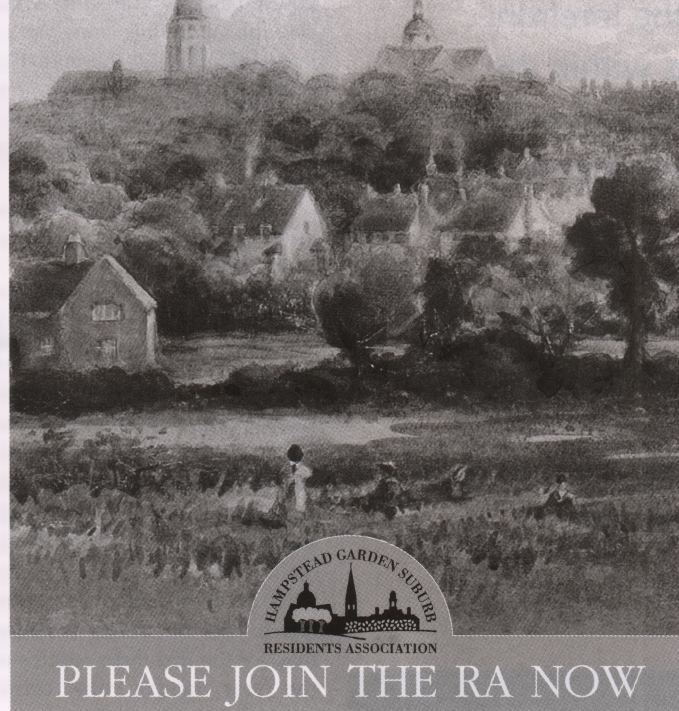
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on the Suburb joined the
Residents Association...
...we would all benefit!



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