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Guidance for windows in North Tyneside's conservation areas

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1. Introduction

As part of North Tyneside Council's commitment to help preserve and enhance the character and appearance of parts of its conservation areas; Article 4 Directions have been issued for certain areas and properties (please refer to information about Article 4 on the Council's website [here](#)¹). The effect of an Article 4 Direction is that certain developments that could previously be carried out without planning consent will now require planning permission.

One such development effected by this is window repair and/or replacement in houses. This Guidance Note has been compiled to advise homeowners and Planning Officers on the appropriate repair and eventual replacement of historic windows.

This Guidance Note is set out as follows: first it will set out the potential scenarios that homeowners will find themselves in with regards to their windows, and the action to be taken for each. Then it will explain each action. Finally, it will set out the reasons why timber is looked on as a more favourable material to uPVC.



¹ <https://my.northynteside.gov.uk/category/1153/article-4-directions>

2. Possible Window Scenarios

If, as a homeowner, you are intending to undertake some works to your windows, it is likely that you will find yourself in one of the three scenarios set out in the table below. If your home is covered by the Article 4(2) Direction, works to windows that do not repair or replace on a like-for-like basis will require planning permission; any proposed works differing from the recommended action set out on the right of the table are unlikely to be supported by the Local Planning Authority.

Scenario	Recommended Action
Original windows survive	Retain and repair if necessary. Good quality replicas are required if original is beyond repair. Sympathetic modifications may be suitable to improve operation or heat retention.
Original windows have been replaced with timber but are in an unsuitable form	Reinstatement of window in original material, design and opening method.
Original windows have been replaced in uPVC	Reinstatement of window in original material, design and opening method.

3. Recommended Actions

Repairs

In many cases, simple repairs can be undertaken to prolong the life of the window. Localised repair is generally much less expensive than wholesale replacement and also maintains the historic integrity of the building. Regular painting and the replacement of perished putty will avoid the need for expensive repairs.

In most cases the original timber is of better quality than today's softwood replacement. It is often only the bottom sill and lower portions of the side frames that tend to rot and therefore need replacement. Properly repaired and maintained original windows can potentially give service for hundreds of years. Such windows are more cost effective in the long term than replacement with modern alternatives.

Modifications

It is now possible to dramatically upgrade the draught resistance and ease of operation of sash windows by fitting modern synthetic parting beads and draught strips. If carried out correctly this need not detract from the historical character of the window, and is a far more cost-effective upgrade than replacement windows.

Secondary glazing systems are available to suit most styles of window. This is an additional pane of glass fitted on the inside of the existing window frame. Secondary glazing is generally easier to install and involves less dirt and disruption than replacement windows. Furthermore, not only is the initial cost of secondary glazing substantially less than new windows, but the insulation effect can be substantial as the degree of insulation is roughly proportional to the air-gap between the panes - the greater the gap, the greater the benefit.

The design of secondary double-glazing should reflect the design of the main windows. Planning permission may be refused for designs that alter the appearance of the window.

Reinstatement

If you are replacing modern windows then you should seek to use the same kind of windows that would have been used originally in the building. There are several ways to do this: find photographs, plans, or sketches with the original windows shown; look at similar properties to your own to see the style of window used; seek the guidance of reputable window companies and agents who should be able to advise you on the appropriate window style; or contact the Conservation Officer who should be able to advise you on the most appropriate replacements.

It will be expected that windows be matched exactly to the originals in terms of the material, the number of and size of glazing bars and method of opening. Timber windows should be painted as they have been traditionally - normally white or off-white, depending on the period. It is highly unlikely that you will be able to order an authentic design 'off-the-peg' from a catalogue. Consequently, it is almost certain that you will need to have a window made-to-measure by a joiner with the necessary tools and cutters, and above all, the necessary application to ensure that the job is right.

4. The Benefits of Timber

The likelihood is that the original windows of your property were made from timber, and as stated above, this is what we would expect to see used as part of a repair or replacement. Why do we insist on timber rather than uPVC?

Attractiveness and historic accuracy

The local planning authority has a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the historic environment; conservation areas and Article 4(2) Directions are put in place to do this. uPVC cannot match timber in terms of detailing and authenticity. The machinery to make uPVC window sections can only make simple shapes, resulting in flat appearing sections that lack the complex mouldings that give traditional joinery its character. Details such as glazing bars are rarely produced to the same fine dimensions as could be achieved with timber. The shiny uPVC material often looks incongruous within historic elevations, compared to the natural beauty and historic accuracy of timber.

Sustainability

Timber is a sustainable resource, so long as it's taken from properly managed forests.

Reduced environmental impacts

The production and disposal of uPVC windows leads to the release of highly poisonous chemicals that threaten the environment and human health. The manufacture of uPVC is an energy intensive process and there are associated environmental risks of oil extraction and global transportation. The manufacturing process requires the use of highly toxic chemicals, resulting in toxic by-products that have demonstrated hazards to health. Most uPVC in use will end up as waste, to be incinerated or sent to landfill. Landfill of such a bulky product is a problem, and may cause soil and water contamination. Incineration is contentious, as the potential for releasing harmful chemicals makes it a high-risk process.

Longevity

Timber windows can be maintained and repaired, and potentially last hundreds of years. For example, joiners can 'splice-in' new timber to replace areas of decay, giving the window a new lease of life, at much less expense and far less disturbance than fitting new. In this way the bottom section may be replaced several times before the main frame is ready for replacement. Keeping windows well painted is also a way of ensuring their longevity. uPVC windows degrade but cannot be maintained or repaired as easily as timber. New windows are often sold on the strength of their low maintenance properties. In practice, these windows and their fittings are often incapable of being repaired. White uPVC does not keep its colour, and unlike timber, cannot be brightened up with a lick of paint.



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