ENGLISH HERITAGE

VACANT HISTORIC BUILDINGS

An owner's guide to temporary uses, maintenance and mothballing

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Historic buildings are an irreplaceable part of our heritage. When they are left vacant, they are at a greatly increased risk of damage and decay, and can easily blight the appearance of their localities. The best way to protect a building is to keep it occupied, even if the use is on a temporary or partial basis. However, it is inevitable that some historic buildings will struggle to find a use, especially in areas where the property market is weak and the opportunities for sale or re-use are limited.

English Heritage has produced this guidance to help owners to reduce the risks facing empty buildings, by undertaking a range of precautionary measures and adopting an active management approach. It 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. By adopting this approach, owners can prevent unnecessary damage, dereliction and loss of heritage significance. They will also benefit by maintaining the market value of their assets and increasing the chances of bringing them back into permanent use.

Listed buildings which are left empty and unprotected may be classified as being 'at risk', either by English Heritage[1] or by local planning authorities. A separate guidance note, *Stopping the Rot*, explains the use of statutory powers to secure the repair of such buildings.[2]

The principles of good practice set out in this document are relevant to all types of historic building. However, the emphasis is on commercial, industrial, institutional and publicly-owned buildings; guidance is already available on the maintenance and repair of domestic buildings[3] and places of worship.[4]

A printed summary of this guidance is available from English Heritage Customer Services: customers@english-heritage.org.uk or it may be downloaded from www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/vacanthistoricbuildings-summary

1 The national *Heritage at Risk* register can be consulted at www.english-heritage.org.uk/risk

2 *Stopping the rot: a guide to enforcement action to save historic buildings*, English Heritage, 2011 www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/stoppingtherot

3 See *A stitch in time*, Institute for Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) / Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), 2002 www.ihbc.org.uk/stitch_in_time.htm

4 See the SPAB Faith in maintenance website: www.spabfim.org.uk/index.php, the Churchcare website: www.churchcare.co.uk/, and the Places of Worship at Risk page on the English Heritage website: www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk/types/caring-for-places-of-worship/

2 STRATEGIC ISSUES

THE ISSUE
Without careful planning, buildings are more likely to stand empty for indefinite periods.

THE AIM
Keep the period of vacancy to a minimum.

TIPS:
- decide at an early stage whether the building needs to be retained in your ownership
- 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 your 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

2.1 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.[5] 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. The disposal of historic buildings by government bodies may raise public-interest issues and will need to be handled in accordance with official guidance.[6] If disposal is not possible, temporary use should be considered (see section 4).

2.2 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 refurbish 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

2.3 Decision to mothball

If a historic building is to be left unused, it will help to explain this decision to people who 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.

2.4 Investment appraisal

In considering investment decisions, it is important to take account of the costs and risks 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 expensive repairs at a later stage.

See footnotes 5 – 6 on following page

FORMER GAS RETORT HOUSE, BIRMINGHAM

This grade II* building in Gas Street, Birmingham, was built in 1822 and forms part of one of the earliest provincial gas works.

In 1998 the property was refurbished for use as an office or workshop space. Although the property is not yet in permanent use, the current owners have found a range of one-off uses including use as a film set and a performance art venue. It has been kept well-maintained and weathertight, helping to retain its commercial value.

2.5 Period of vacancy

The approach taken to managing a vacant building will depend on its condition and the length the length of time for which it is likely to remain empty (often referred to as a 'void period' by commercial landlords). Empty buildings can be characterised as:

- short-term vacant, where the building is to be vacated for a period of up to a year, and there is relative certainty about a future use
- medium-term vacant, for example where market conditions are depressed or investment is not available to bring the building back into good condition
- long-term vacant, where there are inherent difficulties in re-using the building because of its location, size, layout or poor condition

The period of vacancy will influence decisions about how to manage the building, for example in relation to temporary uses (see section 4) and maintaining services (see section 10).

2.6 Heritage at risk

Vacant historic buildings are likely to be categorised as being 'at risk', especially if they are in poor condition. English Heritage publishes a national Heritage at Risk register,[7] and some local authorities and amenity societies maintain their own registers. 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.

2.7 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.

5 See *Managing heritage assets*, English Heritage, 2009 www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/managing-heritage-assets/

6 See *The disposal of heritage assets*, English Heritage, 2010 www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/disposal-heritage-assets/

7 *Heritage at Risk:* www.english-heritage.org.uk/risk

2.8 Specialist advice

Having access to competent 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 English Heritage website.[8] Additional specialist advice may be needed on matters such as historical research, structural safety, building services, security, ecology and health & safety.

2.9 Grant aid

Grant aid may be available from English Heritage 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. There are a number of online lists of organisations and schemes.[9] Most potential grant-givers will expect direct public benefits from their investment, so their criteria should be carefully considered before any approach is made.

2.10 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 English Heritage,[10] including advice for community groups on project development and funding.

8 www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/training-and-skills/improving-practice/accreditation

9 See www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/funding/other-funding/

10 See *Pillars of the community: The transfer of local authority heritage assets*, English Heritage, 2010 www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/pillars-of-the-community-the-transfer-of-local-authority-heritage-assets/

3 TAKING STOCK

THE ISSUE
Without reliable up-to-date information about a building, it will not be possible to make rational decisions about its management, repair and re-use.

THE AIM
Bring together all the information that you need to know about the building, including its layout, condition, significance and any features of special interest, as well as risk assessments and specialist reports.

TIPS:
- make sure that the heritage significance of the building is properly understood at the outset
- instruct an experienced surveyor to record the condition of the building and assess any risks which make it vulnerable
- ensure that the health & safety of staff, advisers and visitors is taken into account at all stages
- keep a photographic record of the building

3.1 Understanding the building

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.[11] Other sources of advice and information include the local planning authority (most authorities have a conservation officer) and the national amenity societies which are concerned with historic buildings.[12]

A better understanding of the heritage 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 English Heritage in *Informed Conservation*.[13]

A brief description of the asset and its heritage values can be presented in a conservation statement, or as part of a conservation management plan. A conservation statement is a shorter version of a conservation management plan, written at an earlier stage in the project before options for different uses have been considered. These terms are more fully explained in guidance issued by the Heritage Lottery Fund[14] and the Prince's Regeneration Trust.[15]

3.2 Commissioning a survey

In commissioning building surveys, owners should draw up a brief specifying what is required; for example:
- an assessment of health & safety issues (see 3.4)
- a report on the condition of the building (see Annex)
- a schedule of the building's significant features
- a schedule of repair works (see section 5)
- advice about the timing of the work, and the impact of delays
- advice about the likely cost of works, which can be used to manage competing budget priorities
- advice about procurement, including how best to select and engage specialist advisers and contractors

3.3 Inspection and analysis

The building is usually inspected element by element, describing each in turn and assessing its condition. For vacant buildings the emphasis will be on weatherproofing elements, such as roofs, gutters and rainwater pipes, openings and storm drainage. The building's condition, especially that of vulnerable elements, should be assessed against the risk of problems that may arise while not in use. The surveyor can then derive 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, asbestos and ecology.

See footnotes 11 – 15 on following page

3.4 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.[16] 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. It may be necessary to instruct a specialist cleaning company 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 risks 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 (see 14.2). Detailed advice on all aspects of health & safety in the construction industry is available from the Health and Safety Executive.[17]

3.5 Recording

The end date for mothballing a building 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. Digital photos or video will provide an accurate, dated record of the building 'as existing'. These can be captioned and referenced to the condition survey and 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. English Heritage has produced guidance on the different levels of survey.[18]

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 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 (see 6.5), recorded and labelled so that as much of the historic fabric as possible can be re-used when the building is reinstated.

11 www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/chr/

12 These societies include the Ancient Monuments Society, the Council for British Archaeology, the Georgian Group, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the Twentieth Century Society and the Victorian Society. For further details see www.jcnas.org.uk/. The Theatres Trust is the national advisory body for theatres: www.theatrestrust.org.uk/

13 *Informed conservation: Understanding historic buildings and their landscapes for conservation*, English Heritage, 2003

14 www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/FurtherResources/pages/ConservationManagementPlanning.aspx

15 See *How to write conservation reports*, available from the Prince's Regeneration Trust: www.princes-regeneration.org/pdf/how-to-write-conservation-reports.pdf

16 See *Surveying safely*, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). This is available to RICS members only, at www.rics.org/surveyingsafely

17 www.hse.gov.uk

18 *Understanding historic buildings: a guide to good recording practice*, English Heritage, 2006: www.helm.org.uk/server/show/nav.19702

THE BLOCK MILLS, HM NAVAL BASE, PORTSMOUTH

The Block Mills is a scheduled monument and grade I-listed industrial building owned by the Ministry of Defence. Largely disused since the 1980s, major repairs were successfully completed in 2008 including brickwork repair, the reinstatement of a roof to the north wing and internal repairs (lower photo). By intervening before the condition deteriorated beyond retrieval, the MoD has stabilised the building until a permanent use can be found.

A conservation management plan was agreed in 2009, containing policies for monitoring the building and establishing routines for regular inspections. The Block Mills was removed from the Heritage at Risk register. It is currently being used for storage.

4 TEMPORARY USES

THE ISSUE
Owners often underestimate the length of time a property will be left empty. A temporary or 'meanwhile' use can bring several benefits, including an improved prospect of attracting a permanent occupier.

THE AIM
Until a permanent solution is found, keep the building occupied through temporary or 'meanwhile' uses to minimise the risk of unauthorised access, physical decay and sudden damage.

TIPS:
- think about the costs and risks of leaving the building unoccupied compared with the benefits of a temporary use
- think creatively about the full range of possible uses, including 'meanwhile' uses for socially-beneficial purposes
- consider using a commercial service to arrange a temporary use or guardian for your building
- think about the potential risks of a temporary use and how to mitigate them
- check if planning permission or other consents are required
- consider the use of a 'Meanwhile use lease' (see 4.8)

4.1 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; see the *Empty shops toolkit.*[19]
- community activities like exhibition spaces and information points
- craft studios and workshops
- art exhibitions, performances, hospitality and events
- storage
- filming

4.2 Advantages of temporary uses

Property owners usually incur ongoing costs once a building is vacant, including business rates on empty space, buildings 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.

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

Temporary use may generate some rental income, but the additional advantages may be considerable even if no income is generated.

4.3 The Meanwhile Project

'Meanwhile use' is a term used to describe the temporary use of vacant buildings or land for a socially-beneficial purpose. It has become more widely practiced since the Meanwhile Project[20] was established in 2009. Meanwhile Space[21] is the delivery arm of the Meanwhile Project, set up to enable community uses of vacant property and sites. It provides a range of tools, such as Meanwhile use leases (see 4.8).

See footnotes 19 – 21 on following page

4.4 Commercial services

There are several commercial services available which find short-term occupants for otherwise empty buildings. The aim is to provide low-cost accommodation and some protection against the risks noted below (4.6). 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.

4.5 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.

The Empty Homes website has guidance on bringing an empty home back into use,[22] and publishes a booklet, *A cure for empty homes*, which explains the different methods that local authorities can use.

4.6 Issues raised by temporary uses

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[23]
- it may be necessary to check whether the structure can withstand increased loadings, for example, from storage use

19 *Empty Shops Toolkit*, 2010, written by Dan Thompson of the Empty Shops Network and published by the Museums & Libraries Association: http://living-places.org.uk/living-places-in-action/our-place-transforming-empty-shops.html

20 www.meanwhile.org.uk/

21 www.meanwhilespace.com

22 http://emptyhomes.com/what-you-can-do-2/resources/empty-homes-publications

23 The Diocese of London has a helpful website about filming in churches: www.london.anglican.org/Regulations/Filming-in-Churches. Much of the advice would apply to other types of building.

BRIXTON VILLAGE, LONDON

Originally called the Granville Arcade, Brixton Village is a 1930s covered market containing about a hundred small retail units. In 2009, a large number of the units had become vacant and a project to bring a range of temporary uses to the site was agreed between Lambeth Council, Space Makers Agency and the site's owners.

Twenty shop units were initially made available, chosen through a competition. Winning uses included arts, catering, theatre and community projects. Occupiers of the units were responsible for any necessary refurbishment, as well as any rates and utilities costs.

By embracing the opportunities offered by temporary or 'meanwhile' use, the landlord was able to pass on the cost of business rates while also ensuring the building was kept refurbished and maintained in the short-term.

The Arcade was listed (grade II) in 2010.

HOOTON PARK HANGARS, CHESHIRE

The three large hangars at Hooton Park Aerodrome were built in 1917 for the Royal Flying Corps. They have Belfast-truss roofs covering 80ft spans. The hangars, listed grade II*, are in various states of deterioration and are Buildings at Risk. They are owned by a trust which is dedicated to their restoration. The site is securely fenced, and the central hangar (pictured) is weathertight, so can be used for the rented storage of caravans, which contributes some funding to its upkeep.

4.7 Mitigating 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 (see section 14)
- notify insurers immediately prior to the intended occupation, with full particulars of the proposed temporary use and the period of the lease or licence (see section 15)
- 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

4.8 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.

A Meanwhile use lease[24] has been developed by the Meanwhile Project to encourage the temporary occupation of empty town-centre shops by non-commercial occupiers. The careful use of this lease can help to minimise administrative and legal costs for both landlord and tenant. Both parties should seek legal advice before signing. Although drafted primarily for shops, it can be adapted for other types of building.

24 www.meanwhile.org.uk/useful-info/view/legal

5 URGENT REPAIRS

THE ISSUE
Vacant buildings are more likely to fall into disrepair. A delayed response may lead to irreparable damage and increased costs.

THE AIM
Prevent the escalation of problems and minimise repair costs.

TIPS:
- act promptly to minimise the escalation of repair costs
- permanent repair may be cheaper in the long term
- scaffolding can cause damage if not erected or dismantled correctly
- keep gutters, gullies and drains in working order and free from blockage

5.1 Taking action

Repairs, however minor, should be dealt with promptly. Failure to do so may lead to escalation of a problem and make it more expensive to correct in the future. A delayed response can lead to irreparable damage to the special features that make a historic building significant.[25] When working with historic buildings, it is important to check with the local planning authority whether listed building consent or any other statutory permission is required (see section 14, Regulatory framework).

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 or English Heritage can take action to secure repair through an 'urgent works notice'. The owner may be liable for any costs resulting from these works.[26]

5.2 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 governed 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 will be most cost-effective in the long term. Owners should consider obtaining specialist advice from a chartered building surveyor, architect or engineer. However, if a full repair is not achievable, consider undertaking temporary measures to prevent further deterioration, make the building safe for inspection and allow maintenance work to be carried out. With historic buildings, it is important that any temporary repairs should be easily reversible without causing damage to the historic fabric. The local authority's conservation officer may be able to offer advice on repair techniques. Further detailed and practical information on the conservation and repair of historic buildings is available in the English Heritage *Practical building conservation* handbooks.[27] The SPAB runs a technical helpline.[28]

5.3 Scaffolding

Scaffolding may be needed for access, or as shoring to support parts of the building. The scaffolding will not be appropriate for both types of use unless specifically designed for the purpose. Historic buildings can be damaged during erection and dismantling of scaffolding; guidance can be found in the English Heritage publication: *Scaffolding and temporary works for historic buildings*.[29]

5.4 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 (see section 11).

See footnotes 25 – 29 on following page

ROOF COVERINGS

A temporary sheet-metal repair has covered a large hole in the original tiled roof, allowing the building to dry out.

5.5 Roof coverings

A sound roof is the first line of defence 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, and should be undertaken in matching materials.[30] 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 must be taken to ensure temporary measures do not in themselves cause damage by increased wind action on unrestrained elements such as roof tiles.

5.6 Gutters, downpipes and gullies

The building's rainwater systems must be maintained in good working order. Neglect of rainwater disposal is one of the commonest causes of deterioration in historic buildings. Resultant problems include deterioration of masonry, dry rot or insect attack, winter frost damage, and saturation of plaster, render or cladding.

Gutters, downpipes and drains must 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.[31] These should be checked and cleared at regular intervals (see section 9).

Cast-iron rainwater goods make an important contribution to the character and appearance of historic buildings. Substituting them with plastic is not normally appropriate except for short-term temporary repairs (for example, when downpipes have been stolen and before like-for-like repairs can be carried out).

5.7 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, care should be taken to ensure that no damage is done to the window frames when fixing it in place (see section 7), and that ventilation is incorporated.

5.8 Interior features

Periods of severe weather, 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 have become loose, it is preferable to support them in-situ and shield them from further damage until a permanent conservation repair can be arranged.

25 *A stitch in time*, IHBC/SPAB, 2002 www.ihbc.org.uk/stitch_in_time.htm

26 *Stopping the rot: a guide to enforcement action to save historic buildings*, English Heritage, 2011 www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/stoppingtherot

27 *Practical building conservation*, revised series, English Heritage, 2011 (forthcoming): www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/advice-by-topic/buildings/maintenance-and-repair/practical-building-conservation/

28 Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, technical advice line 020 7456 0916 (Mon-Fri 09.30-12.30)

29 See *Scaffolding and temporary works for historic buildings*, English Heritage, 2011

30 See IHBC technical bibliography on roofing and roof materials: www.ihbc.org.uk/tech_panel/roof.html, and *Practical building conservation: Roofing*, English Heritage, 2011 (forthcoming)

31 www.spab.org.uk/advice/technical-qas/technical-qa-4-rainwater-disposal/

THE WEAVERS' TRIANGLE, BURNLEY

The unusual roof of one of the listed mills has been fully repaired and re-slated while other badly-damaged areas have been sheeted over and windows boarded up as a temporary measure to keep the buildings secure and weathertight. Any original materials resulting from urgent works have been salvaged, sorted and stored securely for later re-use.[32]

32 www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk/case-studies-har/490133

6 PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE FEATURES

THE ISSUE
Historic buildings usually contain architectural and decorative features which contribute to their character, but which are vulnerable to damage or loss.

THE AIM
Identify all significant, vulnerable or fragile features and take measures to protect them.

TIPS:
- 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

6.1 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, and record and catalogue them (see 3.5). Detailed advice on the care and conservation of historic houses and their contents has been published by the National Trust.[33]

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 may be required (see 14.1).

Particular care is required to prevent accidental damage from scaffolding (see 5.4).[34] 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.

6.2 Raising awareness

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 must be agreed with contractors undertaking repair or maintenance. For example, this may include restrictions on 'hot works' (see 8.3).

6.3 Access control

All access to the property during repair or maintenance works should be carefully controlled and monitored. Where possible, close off any rooms which are not part of the works to reduce accumulation of dust and dirt. Where access through a space containing vulnerable features is necessary, consider installing physical barriers to prevent accidental damage (see 6.6).

6.4 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 (see sections 9 & 10).

See footnotes 33 – 34 on following page

PHYSICAL PROTECTION

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

6.5 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, 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.

6.6 Physical protection

In some situations it will be appropriate to box-in vulnerable elements 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 object and the framework. Ventilation holes must be provided to prevent 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.

6.7 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. Plywood panels can be used for this, supported with props from the floor and separated from the plaster by underfelt or a similar soft material.

6.8 Wall paintings

The delicate nature of wall paintings makes them highly vulnerable. Where physical protection is needed, specialist advice should be sought. More detailed information is available through English Heritage's guidance on *Temporary protection of wall paintings during building works*.[35]

6.9 Joinery and fittings

Timber features such as balustrades and panelling may be vulnerable to impact damage, particularly 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 (see section 11).

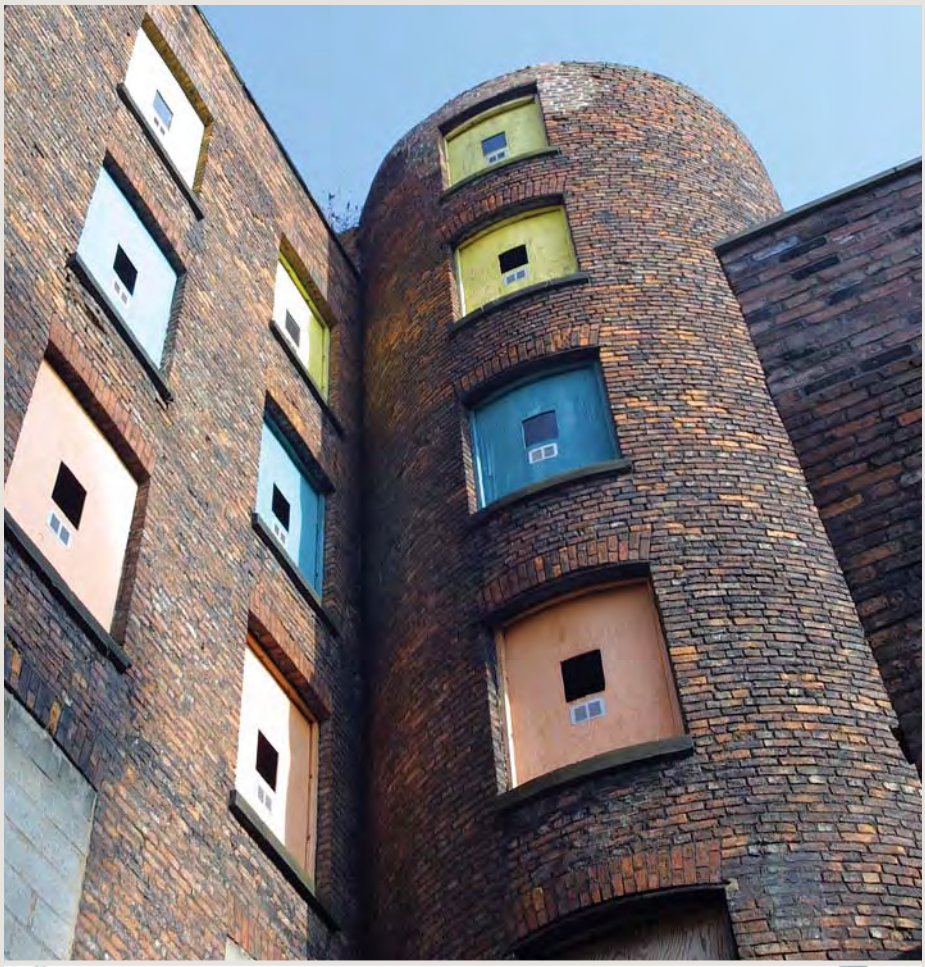
6.10 Historic flooring

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

33 *The National Trust manual of housekeeping*, National Trust, 2011

34 See *Scaffolding and temporary works for historic buildings*, English Heritage, 2011

35 *Temporary protection of wall paintings during building works*, English Heritage, 2002 www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/temporary-protection-of-wall-paintings



MURRAYS' MILLS, ANCOATS, MANCHESTER

During the wait for lottery funding, the windows of this large mill complex were boarded up and painted in bright colours as part of a mothballing exercise. This attracted public attention and made the buildings look cared-for, until repairs, restoration and new uses could be put in place. After repair works to the shell of the buildings (lower photo), small-scale uses are now being introduced.

PHYSICAL PROTECTION

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

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.

6.11 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 (see section 7).

Chimneypieces should be photographed in detail, marked with an indelible ultra-violet marker and logged in an inventory. It may also be necessary to have them specifically itemised on the insurance policy. Consider boxing-in fireplaces so they can not be seen. Use security screws to fix the panels (see 6.6), with padding to prevent direct contact with the chimneypiece, and ensure that the framing is not 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.

6.12 Windows and glazing

Glazing in empty buildings is particularly vulnerable to damage, whether accidental or malicious. Keeping the surrounding area free from debris will reduce the risk of vandalism. Glazing can be damaged during scaffolding works (see 5.4). 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 must be provided (see section 11, Internal environment).

6.13 External features

External features on an unoccupied site are particularly at risk from vandalism and accidental damage. Vulnerable features might include finials, railings, gates, 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 mould or frost damage.

7 SECURITY MEASURES

THE ISSUE
Vacant buildings are more at risk from intruders who may cause deliberate or consequential damage.

THE AIM
Deter intruders or vandalism by good housekeeping and increased security.

TIPS:
- make the site and building secure
- keep the surroundings tidy
- carry out repairs to windows and hoardings promptly
- consider security lighting/CCTV and intruder alarms linked to an alarm centre
- arrange for regular building security checks

7.1 Risks to vacant buildings

Theft of resaleable materials or abandoned equipment is a risk in vacant buildings. Historic building are also at risk from 'heritage theft':

- 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

The Heritage Crime Initiative is a joint project between English Heritage, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service working to prevent and detect heritage theft and criminal damage. For further information see the English Heritage website.[36]

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. For authorised temporary uses, see section 4.

Illegal uses in vacant buildings may include storage of stolen property, illicit drinking 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 and image 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 vulnerable to more serious damage. Graffiti advertises the vacant status of the building as well as causing damage. Vandalism will often escalate if not dealt with promptly. Arson can cause major loss (see section 8.2).

7.2 General security precautions

Assess the security risks, as listed above, in relation to location and ease of access, before deciding the security strategy. Detailed advice on options can be found in the *Code of Practice for the protection of empty buildings*, published by the Fire Protection Association.[37]

The police (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 keyholders and other contacts. Regular security checks by the caretaker or agent should be set up (see section 9), or a security company could be employed.

If 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[38] or organised tours for interested parties may reduce the risk of unregulated intrusions by 'urban explorers'.

See footnotes 36 – 38 on following page

THE DUKE OF CLARENCE PUB AND LONDON ROAD SHOPS, SOUTHWARK.

These grade II Victorian buildings are owned by London South Bank University. A stabilisation and repair project was completed in 2007, with grant contributions from English Heritage, making the buildings secure and weathertight.

While future plans for the site are being actively developed, the properties have been secured with attractive photographic hoardings.

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 protected by boarding-up, internal lights on timing devices can make it look occupied.

Good housekeeping, and dealing with problems promptly, will help deter vandalism and intruders. Rubbish should be removed, and undergrowth cleared and vegetation kept tidy (see section 12). Windows or hoardings should be kept in good repair. Graffiti should be removed promptly.[39] Do not leave ladders or tools in accessible locations.

7.3 Boundary security

Defence against crime or illegal intrusion starts at the perimeter of the site. Perimeter fencing should be maintained or improved; hoardings may be added, but these can screen intruders from view. Planning permission may be required. Trim overhanging trees or high hedges to improve visibility (see section 12) 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 helping 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 keyholder 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 in *The selection and use of electronic security systems in empty buildings*.[40] Useful information on CCTV, alarms and manned security can also be found on the National Security Inspectorate website.[41]

7.4 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 230x230mm or 255x200mm. 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). Accessible openings, including rooflights and cellar flaps, should be blocked up, as well as doors and windows (see below). However, the blocking should not be so strong that an intruder would try to break through the building fabric instead, and any fixings should be designed so they do not damage historic fabric. Listed building consent may be required.

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 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.

36 www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/advice-by-topic/heritage-crime/

37 *Code of Practice for the protection of empty buildings: fire safety and security*, Insurers' Fire Research Strategy (InFiReS) / Fire Protection Association, 2008

38 www.heritageopendays.org.uk/

39 *Graffiti on historic buildings and monuments – methods of removal and prevention*, English Heritage, 1999: www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/graffiti-on-historic-buildings-and-monuments/

40 *The selection and use of electronic security systems in empty buildings*, Fire Protection Association / Insurers' Property Crime Research (IPCRes), 2007

41 www.nsi.org.uk

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 (see section 8) and the desirability for air movement (see 11.2).

FORMER MAXWELL & KENNEDY'S CHOCOLATE SHOP, YORK

The project 'Windows of Opportunity' dresses the exterior of vacant shop windows with artwork chosen through a competition, printed on high-quality vinyl. This creative programme started in 2009 and is run by York Museums Trust with support from Visit York and York City Council. A slightly different approach was taken in Stockport where, as part of the Stockport Boost Initiative, several themed interior window displays were created through input from local art galleries, museums and designers.

It is important that buildings which are visible to the public look secure and cared-for, as a well-maintained external appearance can deter intruders and vandalism.

8 FIRE PRECAUTIONS

THE ISSUE
Fire is more likely to develop in a vacant building and with greater risk of major damage.

THE AIM
Reduce the risk of fire and fire spread.

TIPS:
- 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

8.1 Increased fire risk

A large proportion of traditional buildings damaged by fire are empty or disused. Historic 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. Precautions against the start and spread of fire are vital, together with an appropriate detection system and management strategy. Detailed advice can be found in the *Code of Practice for the protection of empty buildings*.[42]

8.2 Causes of fire

The majority of fires in vacant buildings are caused by arson (criminal fire raising) or firesetting (by minors). The building owners may be prime suspects if it is thought that destroying the building would allow demolition and redevelopment. Other increased fire risks are intruder damage and faulty wiring.

Arson and intruder fire damage are greater risks in vacant buildings. Arson or firesetting may be due to a personal grudge or may be opportunistic (see *Arson in heritage properties and its prevention*).[43] Accidental fire damage may also be caused by squatters or intruders lighting fires.

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 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 (see section 7).

Electrical faults are also a risk; any freestanding electrical equipment should be removed, and where practical, services cut off to avoid fires caused by faulty wiring (see section 10). Fire and intruder alarm circuits must be kept live. Electrical services and lightning protection should be checked and maintained in good condition.

8.3 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 (see *Fire precautions for contractors*).[44] Avoid the use of high-risk elements such as halogen lamps. 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.

See footnotes 42 – 44 on following page

FIRE DAMAGE

This nineteenth-century warehouse, disused since the 1970s, was burnt out in 2006. Parts of the shell have since been incorporated in a housing development.

8.4 Fire protection

The owner's responsibility to carry out a fire risk assessment (as required by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005) applies to vacant as well as occupied buildings. Guidance on commissioning and carrying out fire risk assessments is available from English Heritage.[45] A fire performance evaluation will assess how the risk of fire can be reduced.[46] Where the assessment indicates that there is a high risk of intrusion or malicious damage, levels of both security and fire protection will need to be improved.

The fire load should be reduced by removing flammable furniture and furnishings. Vacant buildings should not be used for the storage of flammable items.

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. 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 (see 11.2).

8.5 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.

Disaster strategy: any historic building should have an emergency response strategy in place identifying items of particular significance and vulnerability.[47] 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 (see 6.6).

Access arrangements should be agreed with the local fire service. Vehicle turning facilities and fire hydrants should not be obstructed by hoardings.

Fire alarms and detection systems may already exist from when the building was occupied. In a vacant building, 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. For detailed advice see *The selection and use of electronic security systems in empty buildings*.[48]

Fire fighting: 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 in remote locations and considered at high risk of fire, where there are highly significant elements, the addition of automatic fire suppression systems should be considered.

42 *Code of Practice for the protection of empty buildings: fire safety and security*, Insurers' Fire Research Strategy (InFiReS) / Fire Protection Association, 2008

43 *Arson in heritage properties and its prevention*, available via the English Heritage Fire Research Database: www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/buildings/fire-research-database

44 *Fire precautions for contractors*, available via the EH Fire Research Database: www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/buildings/fire-research-database

45 *Fire safety engineering in historic buildings*, available via the EH Fire Research Database: www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/buildings/fire-research-database

46 For detailed advice, see *Building fire performance evaluation methodology*, available via the EH Fire Research Database: www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/buildings/fire-research-database

47 *Emergency planning for heritage buildings and collections*, available via the EH Fire Research Database: www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/buildings/fire-research-database

48 *The selection and use of electronic security systems in empty buildings*, Fire Protection Association / Insurers' Property Crime Research (IPCRes), 2007

9 MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE

THE ISSUE
Maintenance problems are more likely to go unnoticed in a vacant building.

THE AIM
Ensure there is an effective programme of monitoring and maintenance to keep the building in sound condition.

TIPS:
- 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
- a local keyholder 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

9.1 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, callouts to emergency services, inspections or visits for repair and maintenance work.

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 (see sections 7 & 8).

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.

9.2 Maintenance regime

A planned maintenance schedule should be drawn up (in consultation with the surveyor who has inspected the building).[49] 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 and controlling vegetation, and take into account seasonal fluctuations in climate. Suggested tasks and frequencies for a mothballed building are set out in the Annex.

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.

See footnote 49 on following page

OFFICERS' MESS, FORMER RAF WEST RAYNHAM, NORFOLK

RAF West Raynham was closed by the MoD in 1994. The site was kept empty and retained as a reserve site and was falling into disrepair until it was purchased by the current owner in 2007.

An on-site maintenance team is now in place to respond quickly to any repair problems. The appearance of the site been improved by controlling vegetation and regular mowing. Elsewhere on the site a variety of new uses are gradually being introduced and the former married quarters have already been brought back into residential use.

Keeping the site's appearance in good order increases its attractiveness to potential residents and other prospective users.

49 *A stitch in time*, IHBC/SPAB, 2002: www.ihbc.org.uk/stitch_in_time.htm

10 BUILDING SERVICES

THE ISSUE
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.

THE AIM
A managed approach to services is required to avoid damage and unnecessary expense.

TIPS:
- 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

10.1 Existing services

A full inventory and risk assessment of existing building 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 which are of interest in their own right and form part of the historic character and listing of the building. Advice should be sought from a specialist adviser or contractor before altering or closing down these systems. The CIBSE Heritage Group may be a useful source of advice.[50]

10.2 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

A good source of information is the HVCA guidance on shutting down and recommissioning of building services in mothballed buildings.[51] This contains a comprehensive list of all the services which may be present, and recommends the maximum period of vacancy before mothballing procedures become necessary.

10.3 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, ensure 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.

See footnotes 50 – 51 on following page

HISTORIC SERVICES

Care should be taken that items of historic interest, such as cast-iron radiators, are not damaged or removed inadvertently.

10.4 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. (See section 11, Internal environment.)

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, bear in mind that existing maintenance agreements may require six months notice of termination in some cases.

10.5 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.

10.6 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. Where necessary, consult a conservation specialist.

50 Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE), www.hevac-heritage.org

51 Heating and Ventilating Contractors' Association (HVCA), *Mothballing and re-commissioning of buildings*, publication SFG30 (ISBN 0-903783-55-X of 2007) within the *Guide to good practice* series

11 INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

THE ISSUE
Poor ventilation and dampness accelerate the process of building decay.

THE AIM
Ensure that humidity levels are controlled

TIPS:
- maximise ventilation without compromising security
- seek specialist conservation advice where there are 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

11.1 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 ingress 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.

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.

11.2 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, see section 8), chimney flues swept and windows fixed partly open. Other possible measures, some of which may require listed building consent, are:

- introducing proprietary ventilators at intervals in the roof or at eaves level
- removing floor coverings such as carpets
- lifting boards where they abut an external wall, to increase air circulation and prevent moisture tracking into the building

11.3 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.

11.4 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 6.12. Ventilation gaps should also be fitted with 25mm mesh to prevent access by birds.

11.5 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.

VENTILATION

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

SUTTONS MANOR HOUSE, SOUTH SHOEBURY, ESSEX

Suttons Manor House is a grade II* manor house built c1681. It was last used as residential quarters for military personnel but has been vacant since the 1970s. The property's location within the boundary of a secure military site has restricted viable disposal options and it is currently included on English Heritage's Buildings at Risk register.

Previously the building had suffered from dry rot, requiring eradication works. Damp was an issue within the building but this has been brought under control through fresh air ventilation and the addition of 'trickle' heating supplied by night storage heaters. Additional work has been undertaken to clear vegetation growth from the courtyard, helping to maintain access for inspections.

12 VEGETATION

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

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

TIPS:
- keep gutters and gullies clear of leaves
- monitor and remove woody-stemmed plants
- keep trees and climbing plants under control

12.1 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.

12.2 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.

12.3 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.

12.4 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 top, lop, uproot, fell or otherwise damage a protected tree. The local planning authority should be consulted well in advance of any works to trees which may be protected, and guidance is available.[52]

12.5 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 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. English Heritage has published guidance on ivy on buildings.[53]

See footnotes 52 – 53 on following page

Unmanaged climbers can grow up onto roofs and into gutters, dislodging roof slates and blocking rainwater drainage.

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

If tree seeds fall on roofs and get established, their roots can exploit cracks in the covering and open up channels for water to get into the building.

52 Tree Preservation Orders: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/tposguide.pdf

53 *Ivy on walls*, www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/ivy-on-walls/

13 WILDLIFE

THE ISSUE
Empty buildings can provide a habitat for various animals, birds and insects. Many species are protected and licences may be required for their control or removal.

THE AIM
Prevent damage to the building and risks to human health from wildlife.

TIPS:
- keep birds out of the building
- wild birds and their nests are protected by law, and you may need a licence to remove them
- layers of bird droppings are a toxic hazard and should be removed by a specialist contractor
- consult Natural England as soon as possible if you suspect your building has bats, or any other protected species

13.1 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 which 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 interfering with them may need a licence (see 14.3).

13.2 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 disturb 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. English Heritage has published guidance on *Bats in traditional buildings*.[54]

13.3 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.

See footnote 54 on following page

WILDLIFE

The grey squirrel is a non-native species.

13.4 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, cage traps should be used, so that any red squirrels caught can be released unharmed.

13.5 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 removing them from a site would require a licence.

13.6 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.

13.7 Insects

Wood-boring beetles are covered in section 11. 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.[55] None of these insect species is protected.

54 *Bats in traditional buildings*, English Heritage 2009, www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/bats-in-traditional-buildings/

55 Advice can be found at: www.spab.org.uk/advice/technical-qas/technical-qa-17-masonry-bees/

14 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

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

THE AIM
Comply with relevant regulations and legislation.

TIPS:
- the owner's legal responsibilities do not end when a building is vacated
- allow sufficient time 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

14.1 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 which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest.[56] 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 uPVC 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 which 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 techniques ('like for like'), and they do not affect the special interest of the listed building.

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. English Heritage deals with SMC applications, and detailed guidance is available on the English Heritage website.[57]

Urgent works notices and repairs notices

A local authority has legal powers to serve an urgent works notice or repairs notice on a listed building owner, requiring repair works to be carried out to prevent further decay. Detailed information can be found in English Heritage's publication *Stopping the Rot*.[58] The notice will describe the proposed works, which must be considered reasonably necessary for the preservation of the building. An urgent works notice is restricted to emergency repairs only, such as works to keep a building wind- and weather-proof and secure against vandalism. A repairs notice is not restricted to urgent works and may include works to preserve architectural details. 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.

Building regulations

Building Regulations approval may be needed for structural or emergency works.[59]

See footnotes 56 – 59 on following page

Dangerous buildings

Section 77 of the Building Act 1984[60] 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[61] allows local authorities to carry out emergency remedial works to remove danger, without reference to the owner.

Section 29 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982[62] 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[63] allows local authorities to require abatement of statutory nuisances, which 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.

14.2 Health & safety legislation

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issues guidance on assessing and managing risks during construction work,[64] 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.[65]

The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006

The HSE has published a 12-step online guide to managing asbestos.[66] 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,[67] 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 8.)

Occupiers' Liability Act 1957[68] & 1984.[69]

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[70]

Employers are required to make risk assessments for people working in empty buildings, such as surveyors carrying out periodic surveys.

56 Section 7 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/contents

57 www.english-heritage.org.uk/your-property/planning-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-scheduled-monument/

58 www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/stoppingtherot

59 www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/buildingregulations/

60 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/55/section/77

61 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/55/section/78

62 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1982/30/section/29

63 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/43/section/79

64 www.hse.gov.uk/construction/index.htm

65 www.hse.gov.uk/construction/campaigns/fallstrips/index.htm

66 www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/managing/index.htm

67 www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1541/contents/made

68 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/5-6/31/contents

69 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/3

70 www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/made

14.3 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, lopping, topping or uprooting of protected trees. Trees in a conservation area are also protected.[71]

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)[72]

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[73]

The 'Habitats Regs' 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[74]

This Act deals specifically with the protection of badgers, not because of rarity but because of particular cruelty to this species.

71 Tree Preservation Orders: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/tposguide.pdf

72 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69

73 www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/490/contents/made

74 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/51/contents

15 INSURANCE

THE ISSUE
Vacant historic properties have specific insurance requirements to cover risks to their special character and the risks associated with their unoccupied status.

THE AIM
Maintain adequate cover to allow for full reinstatement in case of loss or damage.

TIPS:
- notify your insurer as soon as the property becomes vacant
- refer to English Heritage's detailed guidance (forthcoming) on the insurance of historic buildings

15.1 Insurance brokers

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

15.2 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 (see section 14). 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 (see sections 7 & 8).

15.3 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 (see 15.5).

15.4 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.

15.5 Risk management

Unoccupied buildings are particularly vulnerable to a range of risks including arson, burglary and vandalism (see 7.1). 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 (see 8.4 and 8.5). 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.

16 BUSINESS RATES AND TAX

THE ISSUE
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.

THE AIM
Take advantage of any exemptions and discounts that are available.

TIP:
- inform the local authority as soon as the building becomes vacant

16.1 Business rates

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[75] and Business Link.[76]

16.2 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%. More information about council tax is available from Directgov.[77]

See footnotes 75 – 77 on following page

16.3 VAT

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

- approved alterations to listed buildings – including houses, flats, communal residential buildings, and certain buildings used by charities – are currently zero-rated for VAT
- 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*.[78]

75 www.voa.gov.uk/corporate/index.html

76 www.businesslink.gov.uk

77 www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/YourlocalcouncilandCouncilTax/CouncilTax/index.htm

78 www.hmrc.gov.uk/index.htm

ANNEX: 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 questions for the surveyor at the initial inspection	MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST tasks to be incorporated into a planned maintenance schedule	FREQUENCY
BOUNDARY/ PERIMETER SECURITY See 7.3	• 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
VEGETATION See section 12	• 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
ROOF COVERINGS See 5.5	• 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	• Twice yearly and following a severe weather event
		• 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

GUTTERS, DOWNPIPES AND GULLIES See 5.6	• Is there evidence that walls are getting 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
EXTERNAL WALLS	• 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
SCAFFOLDING See 5.3	• 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	• Annually
HEALTH & SAFETY See 3.4	• 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	• During routine visits
WINDOWS AND GLAZING See 6.12	• 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 if a match for historic glass is not readily available	• As required
VULNERABLE FEATURES See section 6	• Are there vulnerable or significant features which 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

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT See section 11	• Are there signs of water ingress internally, or evidence of penetrating or rising damp? • 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?	• 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
SECURITY MEASURES See section 7	• 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
FIRE PRECAUTIONS See section 8	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 • Arrange for inspection and testing of fire extinguishers, alarms and sprinkler systems by a specialist contractor	• Annually
		• Check internal spaces are free of combustible material and other debris	• During routine visits
WILDLIFE See section 13	• 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	• During routine visits
		• Remove bird droppings and other debris	• Annually
	• Is there evidence of protected species such as bats?	• Check for signs of bats	• During routine visits

BUILDING SERVICES See section 10	• Are historic services systems and equipment present which will require specialist attention?		
	• Is there a lightning protection system in place?	• Inspection of lightning conductor by a specialist	• Annually
	• 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 • Turn stop valves on/off to ensure they operate	• Annually • 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

Acknowledgements

This guidance has been developed by English Heritage in consultation with a stakeholder group, including representatives of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, the Homes and Communities Agency, the National Trust and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

The text has been drafted by Marek Drewicz, Paddy Elson, Karen Gwilliams, Will Holborow and Elizabeth Moore, with the assistance of numerous colleagues in English Heritage including Kathryn Hay (section 4), Steve Emery (section 8), David Drewe and Andrew More (section 10), Alan Cathersides (sections 12 & 13) and Beth Harries (section 14).

Photographic credits:
Front cover, 19, 21, 24, 32 (bottom left), 33, 34: English Heritage
4, 8, 12, 14, 26, 30: GHEU
11: Kathryn Hay
15: Darren Ratcliffe/EH
17, 30: © English Heritage.NMR
18, 28: Heritage Works
22 © Seamless Media 2011
32 (top): Defence Infrastructure Organisation
32 (bottom right): Alan Cathersides/EH

Comments on the draft text have been received from the Ancient Monuments Society, Architectural Heritage Fund, Asset Transfer Unit, British Property Federation, Empty Homes Agency, Heritage Lottery Fund, Heritage Works, Prince's Regeneration Trust, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (Conservation Forum) and The Theatres Trust.

The drafting of this guidance has been assisted by reference to an earlier English Heritage publication: *Emergency repairs for historic buildings*, Eleanor Michell, Butterworth Architecture, London 1988 (out of print).

Text edited by Will Holborow and Elizabeth Moore of the Government Historic Estates Unit, English Heritage.

Publication details
Design by Evolve
Product code: 51707

Feedback

If you have any comments or queries, please contact
gheu@english-heritage.org.uk

English Heritage
1 Waterhouse Square
138-142 Holborn
London EC1N 2ST

Published by English Heritage, October 2011

Cover: The General Market Building at Smithfield, London EC1. This was built in 1883 as part of the great expanse of market buildings that continue to dominate the area. Although unlisted, it forms an integral part of the character of the Smithfield Conservation Area. It has been vacant since the 1990s, but English Heritage has recently persuaded the owner to carry out repairs to make the building wind and weathertight, while a future use and permanent repairs to the building are being negotiated.

For further information please contact:
Government Historic Estates Unit, English Heritage
1 Waterhouse Square, 138 Holborn, London EC1N 2ST
020 7973 3802

Published October 2011

ENGLISH HERITAGE

If you would like this document in a different format, please contact our customer services department on telephone: 0870 333 1181 fax: 01793 414926 textphone: 01793 414878 email: customers@english-heritage.org.uk

51707(EVO10/11)