

ARTICLE

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Sean Parnaby, Wood Window Alliance campaign chairman, explains that councils may have a profitable new opportunity to boost the prosperity and heritage of their local areas with the help of today's timber windows.

We may be on the brink of a local transformation. This month a new incentive has been announced by the Government which will help to bring unused and neglected homes back into use.

The independent charity Empty Homes has shown that even the smallest empty home returned to use could earn a local authority more than £7,800 under the rules of the New Homes Bonus announced by Grant Shapps, the Housing Minister.

While Government rules in the past have caused councils to get new homes built when perfectly good homes stand empty, now they will be encouraged to see the empty homes they had previously written off as liabilities as, in fact, valuable assets that can provide income and homes for the community.

So how will local authorities get empty homes back into use, and where will councils and building owners invest their money when it comes to the structure and fabric of the homes on their patch?

If they want to make an impact on the wealth, health and comfort of a local area, refurbishing or replacing the windows is the perfect place to start. In conservation areas or the historical parts of our towns and cities, the issue is absolutely critical.



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Bringing in a plastic window contractor to 'refurbish' whole terraces and pre-war buildings with a lorry load of standard modern double glazed PVCu units would be a tragic waste of this important local investment.

We've all seen the damage unsympathetic replacement windows can make to buildings. According to English Heritage, it's the biggest single threat to our local conservation areas. Estate agents agree – if you want to bring property prices down, rip out the authentic timber windows and doors and put in plastic.

So what should we do when maintaining wood windows in our villages, towns and cities, and especially in conservation areas? The golden rule is to follow the three 'Rs': repair, replicate, replace.

Repair is always the first option to consider when seeking to maintain the character of the building, particularly as the original glass can be retained. Repairs are easy - it is rarely the case that timber windows have deteriorated beyond economic repair, especially in homes built pre-1939. Many Victorian and Edwardian windows are still in good condition today.

Sections of the frame which are no longer sound can be cut out and replaced. Sashes can be freed, cords replaced and draught-proofing materials added discreetly.

If repair is not feasible, it will be necessary to replicate the existing windows in historic or listed buildings. This isn't a cheap option as it involves real craftsmanship, and will probably (but not necessarily) involve losing the character of the original glass. Members of the Wood Window Alliance have the expertise necessary for this speciality and are able to supply exact replicas, even down to the customary putty glazing or the specification of hand drawn or crown glass. Particular care is given to the detailing of traditional sightlines and elegance of glazing bars and beads which can only



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be achieved in wood. Sliding or box sash windows are produced using conventional cords and weights with brass pulleys and ironmongery.

In conservation areas, it is possible to replace existing windows with modern energy-efficient equivalents which mimic the original and maintain the character and value of the building. The key is to replace like with like. This may be a steel window in an Art Deco semi, or a timber window in most period dwellings. Other materials don't have an authentic appearance, or feel; the finish won't be the same, the profiles, the joints, the hinges – the small details which end up making all the difference.

The right replacement timber window will combine all the performance benefits of a modern window with the authentic look and feel of a traditional window. And, because they are factory-made, with factory-applied paints and glazing systems, they offer a long service life of over 60 years, with simple maintenance, providing excellent value for money.

The Wood Window Alliance provides online CPD training modules and other information for specifiers and conservation specialists on all these topics. Recently added is its research on the whole life costs, embodied carbon and service life of modern timber windows.

There is good evidence that maintaining the architectural character of an area has a direct relationship with increasing its prosperity. A well-presented home is worth more than one that shows signs of neglect or has had an inappropriate 'make over'.

The exciting news is that innovative policies are now opening up opportunities to refurbish our housing stock to create value for local communities. When it comes to choosing how to approach these refurbishment options, we must make our investment wisely and based on a sustainable approach.



Footnote:

The Wood Window Alliance unites wood window companies in a campaign to place product quality, industry standards and sustainability at its core. All manufacturer members have to meet a set of quality, performance and sustainability criteria, with third-party accreditation.

www.woodwindowalliance.com

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