

# YOUR PLANNING SERVICE

Repair and  
Maintenance  
of Traditional  
Boundary  
Walls



EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## **Value of Traditional Boundary Walls**

Traditionally constructed walls are a characteristic feature across much of East Cambridgeshire.

A large number of these walls are constructed of either clunch or flint and date from the 18th century. In some areas of the District, traditional boundary walls can be a key feature within towns and villages.

Traditional walls are crucial to our street scenes as they delineate streets, pavements and pathways and can often have a strong bearing on the character of an area. Most boundary walls are contemporary with the houses associated with them and can therefore reflect the architectural style of the house or the status of the original occupier. One of the most important features of any boundary wall is often a consistent appearance. This means that unsympathetic alterations or demolition can result in a negative impact on the street scene.

Within conservation areas, planning permission is normally required to demolish boundary walls, fences, gates or railings that measure more than 1m in height, where adjacent to a public highway (including waterways and public open space), or more than 2m in height in all other cases.

## **Common Faults and Repairs**

Most decay in brickwork is caused by poor maintenance, damp, structural movement, inappropriate pointing or repairs.

The crucial aspect of maintenance is the protection of the walls from water and damp penetration.

## **Spalling, Flaking & Erosion**

Where bricks or blocks are badly decayed or cracked it may be necessary to cut out individual bricks/blocks and replace them with matching materials. Cracks should not normally be pointed, due to the difficulty of inserting individual gauged bricks or pointing them whilst maintaining very fine joints where repairs are essential. It may sometimes be necessary to carefully take down and rebuild using original bricks, matching bricks and the original joint size.

## **Bulges**

Bulges may not necessitate demolition. This should be a last resort once all other options for remedial action have been considered and ruled out. When proposing interventions to walls with large bulges it will be necessary to consult with a structural engineer.

## **Damp**

Well maintained walls should not enable water penetration and should require no additional external coatings to prevent water penetration. Traditional walls should not be sandblasted as this can damage the outer surface of the materials and allow water penetration.

Where water ingress is an issue, care should be taken to identify the problem and undertake any necessary repairs. Commonly this normally results in re-pointing, removing plant growth and/or repairing capping stones.

## **Control of Climbing Plants**

Dense growth of these types of plants can cause problems for boundary treatments. Large plants will cause damp and will prevent water

evaporation from the surface of the wall. Roots of ivy will intrude into the mortar joints, loosening bonds and eventually pushing them apart and causing extensive cracking. Excessive plant growth can disturb footings and all plant growth should be discouraged against clunch.

Ivy should never be ripped away from walls. It should be killed by either cutting through the stem close to the ground or by specialist plant killer. The ivy should be left to die back and then carefully removed from the wall.

## **Stone Cleaning**

It is generally unnecessary to clean stone and brickwork. Generally cleaning treatments may cause more damage, particularly when dealing with clunch.

## **Re-pointing**

Walls will generally only require re-pointing when the mortar has weathered out leaving open or recessed joints that are vulnerable to water penetration.

If re-pointing is necessary, it should be done in a style that is appropriate to the building and the mortar should be in an appropriate colour and texture. The correct mortar mix varies between structures, but the general rule of thumb is that the mortar should be weaker than the surrounding bricks/stone.

## **Flint Walls**

Flint is an impervious material that is very hard, but it does not need to be set in a very strong mortar. Strong cement mortar is wrong to use, as the water that enters the wall through tiny cracks will not be able to dry out. Each flint should be

surrounded in mortar and normally the mortar is slightly recessed.

Repairs to flint walls should be made using flints of a similar size and type to those in the existing wall and laid in a similar style and density. The flints should be knapped or unknapped as appropriate.

## **Clunch Walls**

The most effective method of treating weathered clunch is to grout and make mortar repairs, to apply several coats of lime wash, consolidate the clunch and then apply a shelter coat. The shelter coat is deliberately meant to be sacrificial and will need to be re-applied over time.

For more extensive repairs, it is recommended that specialist advice is sought from contractors with experience of working with clunch.

## **More Information**

If you have a traditional wall that is in need of repair you can contact the Council's Conservation Officer for more detailed advice specific to the individual wall. You can contact them on 01353 665555 or by emailing [conservation@eastcambs.gov.uk](mailto:conservation@eastcambs.gov.uk)

If you require this document in different formats (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape/CD or other languages please contact the council's main reception or email [translate@eastcambs.gov.uk](mailto:translate@eastcambs.gov.uk)

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