Braintree District Council

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Replacement Windows
Essex County Council has produced this leaflet to offer advice to householders who might be thinking of replacing one or more windows.

It is aimed primarily at those who live in 19th or early 20th century terraced houses. These properties are frequently bought up by first-time buyers, in order to 'do them up' before moving on to a larger house. They are thus subject to a variety of 'improvements', which can greatly alter or even ruin the appearance of the house. The replacement of windows is one such alteration.

The following list of 'do's and don'ts' is meant as a guide only, and suggests some of the things to think about before buying and installing new windows.
DO

Consider repair before replacing an original window. In many cases, only part of the window, such as the bottom rail or the sashbox, will be badly decayed or broken. These parts can probably be repaired at less cost than buying a complete new window. It should be possible to find a joiner locally who can do the job for you.

DON'T

Buy a ready-made replacement window from a manufacturer's catalogue or a shop without first considering how it would look in the context of your house. Stained hardwood casements with leaded lights, for example, may look attractive in a glossy brochure, but they will be totally out of place if your house is built of Victorian brick and all the other windows are painted softwood sashes. If your house is also in a terrace, such a new window could spoil the appearance of the whole row.

Typical Victorian terrace before and after window alterations

The character of a terrace depends on the repetition of a limited number of architectural elements, such as doors, windows and brickwork details. If the terrace is attractive, it is because the architect has used these elements in a skilful way. It is important to remember that terraces are designed not house by house, but as a complete entity. This may seem obvious, but a great many people carry out alterations and 'home improvements' seemingly oblivious to the fact that the appearance of the outside of their homes affects their whole neighbourhood.
**DO**

Fit a replacement window (if repair is not possible) that will match your existing windows as closely as possible.

Keep the materials the same as the originals. If your house originally had softwood frames, any new window should also be of painted (not stained) softwood.

The style of replacement window should also match that of the original frames. Do not replace a sash window with a casement, for example.

Retain the original glazing bar pattern: If your windows have four rectangular panes of glass, do not install one with a dozen small panes, nor one with just one large pane.

**DON'T**

Buy a replacement window of a different size or with different proportions to the original. The effects of replacing a vertical window with one of square or horizontal proportions are visually disastrous. The design of the front of the house is thrown off balance, giving a rather 'lopsided' look.

It is common for window openings to be enlarged in an attempt to gain more daylight inside the house. The enlargement of a window, however, will spoil the symmetry of the facade, and should be avoided at all costs.

![A Typical Window Enlargement](image)

**DO**

Make sure that replacement windows are recessed into the brickwork of the outside walls, as they would have been originally. The shadow cast by the window recess helped enliven the appearance of Victorian streets and terraces, and was an important part of the overall design.
Modern windows are often recessed only slightly, if at all, and have narrow wooden sills. Such windows are quite out of place in Victorian and Edwardian houses. These buildings look much more attractive with the shadows created by recessed windows.

A replacement window in such a house should be recessed to a depth of at least 4½ inches and have a suitable sill in a material that matches the original pattern.

Typical window types of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods

DON'T

Automatically opt for double-glazing as an insulation method. Consider 'secondary glazing' as an alternative.

Double-glazing inevitably means the replacement of the original window with one whose appearance is unsuitable for an older building. The glazing bars on double-glazed windows are inevitably much bulkier and less attractive than on conventional windows.

Typical unsuitable replacements

Secondary glazing (ie. installing a separate glazed unit behind the window) does not affect
the external appearance of the original window and can actually give more noise insulation than double-glazing. Applied insulation materials such as bristle or foam strips are also visually acceptable. It is not always advisable to completely draught-proof an older property anyway, as this can lead to problems of condensation and dampness.

**DO**

RESPECT the character of your house. If it is a Victorian or Edwardian building, why try and make it look as if it is Georgian or Tudor by fitting so-called 'period' windows which bear only the most superficial resemblance to real windows of any historical period? The result will be inevitably an historical and visual mess. The use of these 'period windows' in a nineteenth century building is an obvious anachronism. It is common to find buildings where the windows date from a later period than the rest of the house, but the reverse is seldom the case!

**DO**

REMEMBER that late 19th and early 20th century houses have a character and historic interest in their own right. These ordinary dwellings of the last 120 years or so are probably more a part of the built heritage of the majority of the working people of this country than the majority of 'picturesque' historic buildings which have been protected from unsightly alterations by being listed. Following the disastrous experiments in high-rise residential development in the 1960s and 70s, the value of these buildings, both as architectural constructions and as homes, is now being recognised by architects, planners and historians alike. It is hoped that one day their worth will also be recognised by those who live in them.

One of the things that you can do to help preserve the character of these houses is to install windows that match the original style. With Victorian and Edwardian Houses being fitted with 'period' doors, stone cladding, concrete tiled roofs and unsuitable windows, there is a danger that there will soon be nothing left to preserve.