

LISTED BUILDING ADVICE NOTE

REPOINTING

Repointing can have an aesthetic and physical impact on a listed building. Harm can be caused by the use of inappropriate mortars, incorrect mortar joint finishes and even the removal of existing mortar can result in physical damage to the brick or stone. Consequently a change from the existing mortar mix or style of pointing, or the repointing of an entire elevation will require Listed Building Consent. Minor areas of repointing may not require consent as long as it is carried out on a like for like basis.

If surviving historic pointing is in good condition it is important that it be preserved; we would not support the replacement of historic pointing for aesthetic reasons. The replacement of a cement based mortar with lime is in essence good for the long-term health of the listed building, but removal of the cement mortar can cause damage to the brick or stone if not carefully carried out. We generally suggest cement pointing is not removed unless it is causing a significant problem to the brick or stone or has failed and can be easily removed by hand.

Advantages of lime mortar

Lime mortar has many crucial advantages over cement-based mixes. Historic brickwork was always laid in lime mortar.

Lime mortars are porous and allow water in the structure to escape by evaporation through the mortar joints, rather than the bricks or stone. Cement mortar pushes the water through the face of the brick or stone which can be very damaging as it causes the face to spall (to flake off and break down). Lime mortar is a flexible material that can absorb the movement of historic structures without cracking.

Getting the correct mortar mix and pointing style

The correct mortar mix depends on many factors: the nature of the building material, the location of the building and orientation of the elevation. It is advisable to seek professional advice prior to submitting an application for consent or carrying out minor areas of repair, and details of specialists can be found in the Further Information section of this advice note.

The type of pointing style can depend on what is currently present on the listed building, although replication of inappropriate pointing techniques such as weatherstruck would not be considered acceptable. In conservation work mortar joints are usually finished slightly recessed from the face of the brick, so that the edges (called arrises) are exposed, and brushed or tamped (pounded with a specialist brush).

Applications for Listed Building Consent for repointing will require the construction of a sample panel to show the mortar and finish of the joints.

Further information

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), www.spab.org.uk: produce technical advice notes on all manner of conservation issues, including lime and repointing, and run courses for homeowners of historic buildings.

Local companies can provide a range of services and products, including mortar analysis:

Chalk Down Lime Ltd, Staplecross, East Sussex: www.chalkdownlime.com

Other specialists can be found in the Building Conservation Directory (www.buildingconservation.com)