

Painting the Exterior of a Listed or Unlisted Building in a Conservation Area



Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent

You should always check whether or not formal consent is required for the external repainting of your building as the choice of colour, design, material and technique can have a significant impact on the character of the building.

- Planning permission is required for the painting of listed buildings or unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas.
- Listed building consent is required for the alteration or extension of a listed building which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest. Painting is regarded as an alteration and most paint schemes will have an effect on the character of a listed building if the colour is changed. Repainting in the same colour will not normally require planning permission and/ or listed building consent.

What We Look For

In general we will consider whether your proposals protect and enhance the traditional character and appearance of the building if it is listed, and the area if it is in a conservation area. In listed buildings you must use historically correct external painted finishes in a manner which is appropriate to the building.

Issues and Considerations

Painting facades previously painted

In many instances the painting of facades, particularly of rubble and rendered buildings is a local tradition, which should be respected and encouraged. Also a dressed stone façade may be painted to draw attention to a modest frontage. The function may be more fundamental in protecting poor quality stone. If more than one colour is to be used they should all relate to the architectural features of the building in a

logical and consistent manner. One storey should not be painted a different colour from another or one part of a building from another. The exception is the case of shopfronts which are clearly differentiated from the upper floors.

Painting facades not previously painted

Painting a façade can bring about a radical change in the character of a building. Painting a sandstone façade, especially one incorporating extensive plastic repair, should only be considered as a last resort. In most cases it will not be permitted although there may be exceptions for example to disguise past inappropriate repairs covering more than half the original masonry surface.



Examples of typical traditional limewash colours





The sensitive use of colour can contribute much to the street scene; but there is no standard formula. The imposition of corporate colour schemes regardless of the location may erode the character of the area but minor variations can often emphasise the uniqueness of the location. Any intention to change colouring must be discussed and approved by the Planning Service.

All paints should be porous. The best solution in the case of harl or render is a traditional limewash which may have pigments, usually earth based, to colour, added if appropriate.

Colours are obtained using alkali-resistant (“limefast”) pigments, particularly metal oxides from natural earths. Pink is often associated with Suffolk, for example, and vibrant orange with the Lothians. Impurities in early lime commonly produced offwhite limewash without additional pigments, not today’s startling white.

Timber doors and windows

While many windows have been painted brilliant white since the 1950’s, the use of traditional shades of blue, greys, green, dark red, brown and off white are traditional and will be encouraged where appropriate. It is important to achieve a correct surface finish to timber. Paint is usually appropriate, whereas modern stains or varnish is unlikely to be, although in some instances a traditional grained varnish finish may be appropriate. Pastel or bold primary colours are not generally acceptable.

Preparation of surfaces and removal of existing paint

Only non-abrasive methods of cleaning should be used, with stiff natural bristle brushing and, where absolutely necessary, a chemical stripper used as per the manufacturer’s instructions may be considered where paint is particularly difficult to remove. However, the normal chemical, paint removing systems containing methylene chloride should only be used after trials on inconspicuous stones. Paint removal from porous sandstone, especially where the stone surface has been damaged by previous stone cleaning, will require analysis of the paint layers prior to selection of the removal method. A poultice prepared from absorbent material such as clay (kaolinite or spiolite), mixed with a cleaning solution to form a paste may also be considered but the process of removing the poultice can cause damage to fragile surfaces. Sand or grit blasting is almost always not suitable as it is likely to damage the stone. However, in certain cases the least damaging system for the removal of large areas of paint from a sandstone façade may be the use of a very low pressure micro-abrasive system.

Paints and colours

Colour can be an extremely important factor in determining the character and appearance of buildings. In the case of listed buildings or buildings in Conservation Areas it is subject to planning control.



Margins and plain architraves in harled or rendered buildings

Fanlights and door facings

In Georgian buildings fanlights and door facings should generally be white or off white. Painting to match the door colour may be acceptable in Victorian and some other buildings. Where doors are varnished hardwood or grained the facings and fanlights should be given a matching treatment.

Rainwater goods and ironwork

This includes the painting of gutters, downpipes, soil and waste pipes, external flues and balanced flues. Original lead rainwater goods should not be painted. Cast-iron downpipes and flues on main elevations should be painted to match the wall surface whilst ornamental cast-iron rainwater goods were often painted in a contrasting colour and in particular cases this may be appropriate.

Shops and business premises

General:

- The creation of a strong identity for the individual unit should be secondary to ensuring an appropriate balance within the street scene as a whole.
- Colour schemes should respect the architectural form of the frontage and should not merely apply alien treatments and designs.
- Colour schemes should be sympathetic to the treatment and character of the main façade and adjoining properties.
- The use of one or two colours only is most likely to be successful. The use of several colours requires a careful balancing of elements which can be difficult to achieve.
- The junction between painted and other surfaces should be provided by an architectural detail such as a string course, cornice, pilaster, moulding or downpipe. If no such details exist it may be more appropriate to remove the paint or painting the frontage to blend with the surrounding stonework.
- Unpainted stonework and other good quality materials should not be painted.
- Care should be exercised in colour choice to avoid confusion with traffic signals and road signage.
- Corporate colour schemes should be adapted to suit the character of the area.

Original individual stone units (defined by cornices, pilasters etc)

Original unpainted shopfronts should not be painted. Where a unit has been painted and is within a residential block stone colours are likely to be acceptable.

Original or applied timber shop units:

The frontages should be painted in a rich dark or neutral colour.

Groups of uniformly designed shopfronts:

Where a unified paint scheme exists this should be retained, or another co-ordinated scheme agreed by the shop owners. Where a co-ordinated scheme does not exist, the shop units should be painted to respect the architectural coherence. This can be achieved by one of the following approaches (in descending order of preference):

- A uniform paint scheme for the group (a return to natural stone may be appropriate in certain circumstances)
- A common main shop colour with some variations in colour of details (doors, windows and lettering)
- Individual paint schemes to units but each shop painted in a similar weight of colour (i.e. no strong contrasts), and unified by a similar approach to the painting of shop elements (lettering and location of signage).

Where a group of shopfronts have common details which help unify the façade (arches, pilasters, brackets or ornate mouldings) a uniform treatment of these elements may be necessary to avoid destroying the unity of the design.

Uncoordinated groups of shopfronts:

- Where shopfronts form part of one block but are of unrelated design, the paint scheme should be simple to avoid creating visual confusion in the street.
- Limiting the range of colours within a block and avoiding multiple strong contrasts between units helps to unify the group.

Two storey shop units:

Two storey shop units should be given a unified treatment to the two storeys. Where occupancy differs subtle variations are acceptable.

Projecting shop units:

A projecting shop unit should be painted in a dark/muted colour which relates to the main façade to reduce the impact of the projecting unit, particularly the blank gables.

Common stairs in groups of shops:

The surround to common stair openings should be included in the paint scheme of one of the adjoining shops, where this is acceptable to the residents. Stone surrounds should remain unpainted.

Shopfront Details

Fascias:

Fascias/sub-fascias should generally be painted in the same colour as the shopfront.

Traditional fascias framed by a cornice, mouldings, pilasters or brackets may be painted in a complimentary colour (normally darker).

Existing applied fascias on unpainted stone shopfronts should be painted to match the window and door frames.

Existing sub-fascias located within an original window opening should be painted in a dark colour to reinforce the original window proportions.

Shop windows, frames and doors:

Where a shopfront is painted in a strong colour, window frames, facings and doors can be painted white, black, neutral or a dark colour or to match the main façade.

Where the shopfront is a dark or neutral colour, stronger colours can be used on door, window and lettering elements.

Basecourse and stallriser:

These should be painted to match the original colour or painted black or neutral, The approach should be consistent for any group of properties.

String courses/cornices:

String courses above a group of shops should be uniformly treated (unpainted stonework should remain unpainted).



Examples of insensitive use of colour (above) and effective use of bright colour from a traditional palette of colours (right)



Examples (above and right) of traditional gilt lettering on a glass fascia.



Example (above) of effective, sensitive, use of contrasting colours. In this case the original colour scheme has been researched and reinstated.



Signage - lettering

Strong colours should only be used where the main frontage colour is dark or neutral. White, black, creams or muted colours are appropriate for other situations.

Gold leaf can be used on individual letters or applied directly to a painted shopfront.

Good lettering on fascias, windows and doors should be retained wherever possible, as should high level lettering where this is an original or early feature. Lettering should not be too large or obtrusive. Sign-written fascias are encouraged, as is the use of individually applied raised letters - however, care should be taken to avoid damage to the stone facing on the building to which the lettering is to be applied.

Although the style of lettering can help to convey the image of a shop it should also be sympathetic to the character of the building and area into which it is set. Accordingly national multiples may have to adapt their house style to suit sensitive locations. However in some cases it may be appropriate to apply hand painted lettering directly onto the masonry.

The amount of information and size of lettering should be appropriate to the size and dimensions of the fascia, such as in the examples below. Name and occupation is usually sufficient information.



Example of acceptable hand written lettering sign (above) and national multiple sign adapted to fit fascia (left).

Glossary

Façade- front or face of a building, usually implies an architectural treatment

Rubble- a term used to describe any build where the stones are not fully dressed.

Dressed- all embracing term, used to describe stones worked to a smooth face and used to form features. Dressed stonework is any stone which has been cut to a smooth face.

Render- a term used to describe any durable, protective coating applied to an external wall.

Harl- a form of roughcast widely used throughout Scotland and the north of England, in which a mixture of an aggregate (usually small even-sized pebbles) and a binding material (traditionally sand and lime, latterly portland cement) is dashed, or hurled (harled) on to a masonry wall.

Limewash- in effect a very thin lime putty, used as a paint or protective coating, can contain a binder such as linseed oil or tallow. It is usually white, hence white wash, pigments were added to form a colour wash.

Margin- margins frame an opening or emphasize the angle of a building; most are raised (usually adopted when the building was to be harled but sometimes used decoratively) but some are chamfered and some are backset (ie recessed from the plane of the harl or render).

Architrave- the term is commonly used to describe a moulded surround to any opening, but is usually applied to a door or window opening.

Fascia- the broad, horizontal board over a shopfront which carries the name of the shop. Also, a board carrying the rainwater gutter.

Plastic Repairs- a term used to describe mortar repairs to stonework, to give a new surface to the stone.

Recommended Reading

- Heaton, 1928, Noel Outlines of Paint Technology
- A guide on repainting and removal of old lead painted surfaces, The British Coatings Federation, James House, Bridge Street, Leatherhead KT22 7EP
- Schofield, J, 1995 Lime in Building. Black Dog Press, Crediton, Devon.
- Scholfield, J, 1986 Basic Limewash, SPAB Information Sheet 1, London, Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

- Building Research Establishment, 1990 Digest 354, Painting Exterior Wood, Watford, BRE
- Ashurst, John and Nicola, Practical Building Conservation/English Heritage Technical Handbook, Volume 3 'Mortars, Plasters and

Do:

- Do apply for planning permission or listed building consent
- Do make sure the external painting you are carrying out will preserve or enhance the character of the building and comply with the guidelines above

Don't:

- Don't sign any contract until you have checked with us that the external painting you are planning carrying out meets our guidelines
- Don't forget we can take action to make you remove any external painting that needs consent but does not have it.

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