HOME MAINTENANCE GUIDE

This guide gives practical help and advice about how to maintain and carry out simple repairs to your home. DIY isn't easy. Hopefully, this guide will give you the confidence to tackle basic home repairs and alert you to the danger of taking on too much before getting professional help. However, the more work, especially preventative, you can do yourself, the more money you will save in the long run. Where possible, we have given a contact number but, if you are in any doubt, please contact:

Private Sector Renewal Section
Civic Centre, Home Gardens,
Dartford DA1 1DR
01322 343379

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Awareness - why?

Your home is probably the biggest investment you will ever make. It needs to be looked after and maintained. There are several things that could happen if you don't do routine checks and repairs:

- Your house could deteriorate resulting in unhealthy or dangerous conditions
- You could damage adjoining buildings for which you may be liable
- Your house could lose some of its value
- The area you live in could deteriorate gradually

On these pages you will find advice on:

- How to check your home
- How to maintain your home
- How to choose and employ contractors
- What to do when you need to make an insurance claim
- What to do if you find something wrong with your contractor's work
- Where to go for extra help and advice
- What to do in an emergency

How to check your house

Inspecting your home regularly could help you to spot a problem before it causes serious damage. Such problems can often be put right cheaply, but if left, could end up being expensive. Are parts of the ground floor floors more springy or bouncy, especially nearer walls? This may mean rotten joint ends and some joists may need replacing.

Condensation on a windowpane

Heating - warm air can hold more moisture than cold air so if your house is heated you are less likely to suffer from condensation. Warm air cooling in the night will still result in condensation, especially on windows during cold and wet weather. Most of this will evaporate as heating is turned on again in the morning and windows are opened.

Ventilation is the normal escape route for moist air. As the air in your house circulates, it is drawn outside through open windows, doors, extractor fans, air bricks and chimneys and is replaced by fresh air. If this exchange of air is prevented the air in the house will become saturated and will condense on the nearest cold surface.

To allow air to circulate and be exchanged for fresh air you should consider some of these:

- keeping lids on pans when cooking
- drying clothes outside or have a pipe taking the tumble dryer's moisture outside
- running the cold water for a bath before the hot water
- not using liquid paraffin or bottled gas room heaters.
- fit extractor fans to bathrooms and kitchens
- open windows in the room where airborne moisture is being given off
- keep bathroom and kitchen doors shut to prevent moist air circulating to the rest of the house

• avoid still air pockets - areas between furniture and external walls
• curtains may trap air which will condense as temperatures drop. Move furniture away from these walls for an hour or so as often as you can and don't leave heavy curtains closed during the day.

Insulating your house - loft insulation, wall insulation and double-glazing - will mean you keep the heat in your house longer, walls are warmer and the chances of damaging condensation are greatly reduced.

Inspect the outside

- Chimney pots - are they leaning or broken? If so, they may need replacing or the mortar holding them in place may need renewing.
- Chimney - is it leaning, or are there many damaged bricks? If so, it may be dangerous.
- Bricks may need replacing; it may need repointing or even rebuilding.
- Flashings - this is the lead sheeting around chimney stacks and wherever your roof and brickwork meet. They prevent water getting in at the edge of slates or tiles. Have they slipped or are they missing? If so, you should call a roofer to give you an estimate for sorting out any problems and keeping water out.
- Tiles or slates - are there any slipped, missing or broken tiles or slates? If so, they need to be replaced or put back in place. Call a roofer.
- Roof timbers - does the roof appear to sag? If so, one or more roof timbers may need replacing or strengthening.
- Gutters and drainpipes - are they leaking, damaged or

overflowing? Even a small leak will damage bricks, rot wood and cause damp if it is not quickly repaired.

- Overflow - if water is coming from these it means that a water pipes tank or toilet cistern ball valve is not working properly. Repair it quickly before any damage or damp is caused.
- Bricks and mortar joints - are brick faces or the mortar joints between bricks eroded or crumbling? Poor brickwork allows water to penetrate.
- Cracks in the walls - if cracks suddenly appear in mortar joints or bricks or become much worse get advice or ask a surveyor or structural engineer to have a look. Look in the Yellow Pages under Structural Engineers.
- Timber doors - wood will rot if it is not properly protected with paint or stain. Check whether the paint is cracked, loose or peeling.
- Airbricks - these help stop the floors rotting by allowing air underneath. Don't block them with soil or paving and make sure they are clear and clean - see timber floors.
- Damp proof course - most houses have a waterproof layer to stop rising damp. Make sure that earth and paving are kept six inches below this or your house may get damp.
- Gullies - have they got grids on the top, are all the waste pipes pouring properly into them and are they emptying properly?

Repairs & maintenance: DIY, builder, tradesman, specialist

Whether to do a job yourself or call in someone else will depend on your physical ability, technical know-how, time available, personal finance, availability of tools and, in many

cases, how comfortable you feel at the top of a ladder!

Chimneys, pots, flashings, tiles or slates and roof timbers
Scaffolding may be required and it is easy to cause more damage - best left to a builder.

Gutters and downpipes, bricks and mortar joints and painting upper storey windows
Do it yourself if you are comfortable on a ladder or you can hire a tower scaffold. If not, leave it to the professionals.

Airbricks, ground floor windows and door painting, maintaining gullies and waste pipes, reducing earth and paving to 6 inches below the damp proof course.
Do it yourself.

Cracks in external walls, structural cracks to wall or ceiling plaster
Consult a surveyor or structural engineer before you do anything else. Chemical damp proof course, dry rot treatment and woodworm treatment Consult specialist companies. Always get two reports and quotations.

Electrical work
If in doubt consult NICEIC registered (Domestic Installer) electricians and get two reports and quotations before agreeing work should start.

Gas appliances including fires, heaters and gas central heating
Get checked annually by a Corgi registered person. Any work required must be carried out by a CORGI registered person. Get two quotations for the work.

Internal joinery including floors, skirting's, stairs, handrails and internal doors

Except for minor jobs these should be left to a builder unless you have some
experience.

Repair and maintenance of taps, pipe joints, wastes

Do it yourself.

Painting

Painting external woodwork such as window frames, doors and fascia boards need painting or staining every three years to stop them rotting. Rain, frost and sunshine all combine to damage paint and let water into the wood. The materials you need are easily available, but even employing a painter is much cheaper than having to replace rotten woodwork. Don't paint wood when it is likely to rain. The best time to paint a house is early or late summer.

What you need to do is . . .

Wash down the wood with warm water containing a small amount of washing- up liquid and rinse with clean water.

Rub down with sandpaper wrapped around a small block of wood and make sure that you remove all loose paint.

Paint stripper - if the paint comes off in long strips or is cracked you should use paint remover to get down to bare wood -details of how to use it will be on the bottle or tin.

Then use a rag dipped in white spirit or turpentine to wipe the area down. Remember to protect your eyes and skin.

Filling - scrape out any areas of rotten wood. Softened wood can be strengthened by painting with wood hardener such as Ronseal wood hardener. Fill any holes or cracks with putty or wood filler.

Prime – use wood primer paint to paint any areas of bare wood.
Undercoat - paint throughout with undercoat paint and, when it's dry, sandpaper lightly so that you just scratch the surface of the undercoat.
Top coat - paint with two coats of gloss paint remembering not to put too much paint on the brush. Use special exterior 'microporous' paint outside as this will last longer.
Brush care - to save brushes from hardening when you take a break, put them in cold water. When you want to use them again, wipe off the water and rub the brush on some old newspaper. When you have finished all your painting, wash your brushes in white spirit or turpentine followed by a rinse in warm water and washing up liquid.
Do not dispose of white spirit or turpentine through your drains. Put it in a sealed container and bin it.

Tools, equipment and materials

- Sandpaper and sanding block
- Paint remover - if there are bad areas of paint
- Paint brush for applying remover – don't use the same brush for painting
- Paint scraper - useful for scraping off loose or flaking paint
- White spirit or turpentine
- Wood Hardener and Wood Filler or putty - if there is rot, holes or cracks
- Primer paint - if there is bare wood
- Undercoat
- Gloss paint - microporous for outside
- Paintbrushes - half inch ones are generally best for windows and doors
- Ladder or tower scaffold for reaching upper windows.
- Hiring a tower scaffold will be cheaper than getting a

painter to do the work and safer than working from a ladder - about £50 - £60 a week.

• Masking tape - to tape newspaper to glass and prevent splashes.

• Mastic gun and mastic - if you need to seal around windows and doors.

Sealing around a window with mastic

Sealing - the gap between the side of windows and doors and the wall can be filled to stop water getting in. You can do this by buying tubes of 'mastic' which you apply with a cheap and simple 'mastic gun'. When dry, it is a bit like rubber.

Gutters and downpipes

Repair leaking gutters before rainwater causes extensive damage to bricks, rots windows and causes damp. Most gutter leaks are caused by one of four problems: blockages, holes, cracks, or sagging.

Blockages

Use a small brush and clean along the gutter. You may find it easier to have a bucket tied to the ladder to put waste in. Putting a piece of gauze or chicken wire over the downpipe outlet should stop leaves getting into the downpipe. Flush blocked downpipes out with a hose.

Holes or cracks

These can be repaired provided they are not too large. On plastic, use a plastic sealing compound while on cast iron use a metal putty or fiberglass. Examples of such products are 'Marley Sealtite', 'Aquaseal 88', 'Sylglass Waterproofing

Tape' and 'Mangers Stop-That-Leak' aerosol spray.

Leaking joints

Joints between lengths of guttering can sometimes leak because the rubber seal is worn or has dirt underneath. To clean under or to change the seal in plastic guttering you unclip the gutter. With some types of gutter you buy new seals but with others you replace the joints.

Sagging

If the gutter is sagging or sloping the wrong way water will not flow to the downpipe properly. You will need to move or buy extra brackets. As there are different ways of fixing them look to see how the others have been done.

Gullies and sinks

To carry water away underground there are gullies and drains. They take water from gutters, sinks, baths, showers, washbasins and waste from the toilet.

Gullies

To keep your gullies and drains working properly make sure that there are metal grates over the gullies, that the grates are not blocked with leaves. Every three months you should put three large cups of washing soda crystals or half a bottle of strong bleach down the gullies. Leave it overnight and then rinse by pouring down some buckets of water. Do not breathe in any fumes given off from the bleach or crystals and, protect your skin.

Blocked sinks

To clear a blocked sink, block the overflow with a cloth, then, holding the cloth in place push a plunger up and down quickly over the plughole. Alternatively, use a thin

wire to dislodge the obstruction. If this does not work, unscrew the cleaning eye or plastic fitting under the sink and clean the pipe with wire from both sides. A proprietary sink unblocking fluid may also be used.

Drains and sewers
Repairs to and Blockages in Drains and Sewers

Advice to Householders and business owner/occupiers that are connected to main drainage

The following is general advice, but as with most things there are exceptions to the rule, drainage is no different. If you are unsure take further advice, the Council's drainage section can be contacted at:

drainage@dartford.gov.uk
or
telephone 01322 343255

Public Sewers

Sewage is removed from your home via a network of pipes which may be in public or private ownership. The large sewers normally situated under public highways are usually owned and maintained by the sewerage undertakers and are known as public sewers. Public sewers may also exist on your property if the pipe was built before 1 October 1937 and serves more than one property.

The sewerage undertaker for this area is either Thames (telephone 08459 200800) or Southern Water (telephone 0845 278 0845). Any problems regarding repair, cleansing and maintenance involving public sewers should be referred to your sewerage undertaker. Generally if you receive a

separate sewerage account from Southern, then you should contact them, if you receive a combined water supply and sewerage account you should contact Thames. If a sewer is not in public ownership then it is private.

Private Sewers

The pipes that were built after 1 October 1937 which connect groups of houses to the network of public sewers are in private ownership. Any pipe which drains a single property or a number of properties/buildings within the same curtilage is defined as a drain and is private regardless of when it was built.

When a pipe drains two or more properties in separate curtilages it is a sewer. Any sewer which is not vested in the sewerage undertaker is a private sewer. All drains and private sewers are owned and maintained by the owners of the properties which they serve, up to the connection to the public sewer, even if they are situated in land which is outside the curtilage of those properties.

The cost of relaying private sewers

Householders are frequently confused by drainage law which is set out in several enactments originating in the 19th century Public Health Acts. The purpose of this page is to summarise the relevant responsibilities of private householders. On housing estates built after 1937 the whole network of drains and sewers may be in private ownership which would then be the joint responsibility of all the property owners and/or occupiers served by them. When major repairs are necessary and private sewers have to be re-laid the cost is borne by the owners of the properties served by those sewers in proportion to the benefit derived from use and not in proportion to the

number of properties served. Depending on the terms of any household insurance you may have, you may be covered for most of any repair costs; it would be worth enquiring.

Sharing the cost

The three sample illustrations below show how the responsibility for certain lengths of private sewer is split. The cost of the repair per household is proportional to the length of repaired sewer serving that house and is calculated using a standard formula.

Local Authority Powers

Local Authorities have three main powers for dealing with blockages and repairs to defective private sewers and drains.

Blocked Drains/Private Sewers

Failing this the Council can serve a 48 hour Public Health Act notice. If the notice is not complied with, they may carry out the work themselves and reclaim the expenses from the person(s) concerned by apportionment of costs. This means that the blockage could remain in place for the 48 hours with the extra cleaning costs and administrative costs added to the basic unblocking charge.

Minor Repairs to Drain/Private Sewers

The Council can serve a 7 day Public Health Act notice of their intention to deal with a drain, private sewer etc that has not been maintained and kept in good repair. It can recover its expenses by apportionment of costs.

Defective Drains/Private Sewers

In dealing with a major defect, affecting a large number of

houses the local authority may serve a Building Act notice requiring repair within 42 days. It can recover its expenses by apportionment of costs.

Repairing brick walls

Mortar joints hold bricks together and stop rain getting in. If they are soft, crumbling, cracked or are badly worn, they need to be repaired to prevent damp and strengthen the wall.

Raking out joints - use a plugging chisel and club hammer to clean out the mortar to a depth of half to three quarters of an inch, (12-18mm), from about a square yard or metre of wall at a time. Brush the wall down to remove dust.

Mixing mortar - measure out one part cement, one part lime and six parts sand in any clean container. You can buy these from a builder's merchant or a large DIY store. Mix the dry materials first and slowly add water whilst still mixing until a firm smooth mortar is produced.

Pointing - wet the wall by flicking water onto it, and then force the mortar into the joints. Wait until the mortar is a little stiff and then rub a piece of rough cloth along the joint until it is smooth and level with the bricks. Brush off any waste from the bricks when it is dry.

Damaged bricks - if the outer face of the brick is damaged it is best to replace it or it may cause damp. Before starting, make sure you have a replacement, as older bricks are larger than modern ones. Some builder's merchants may have these; otherwise you will have to find someone who is knocking down an old wall. To take a brick out, remove the mortar around it to a depth of 4 inches, 110mm, and then try to dislodge or break it.

Alternatively, you can do a temporary repair by carefully spreading render over its surface. Mix the render the same as mortar except use one part cement to four parts sand

and no lime.
Airbricks – if you have timber floors on the ground floor it is very important that air is allowed underneath to help prevent the wood from rotting. To do this you should have airbricks on the outside walls near the ground. These should not be blocked by paving or earth and must be kept clear by poking with a stick.

Windows - glazing repair


Chiselling off the old putty

Carefully remove broken glazing/old putties and give the inside of the frame where the glass goes one coat of wood paint or primer.
Check glass size - when you have the new piece of glass, check that it is the right size by a trial fitting. Take the glass out and then get the putty ready.
Apart from glass, you will need a tub of putty and some panel-pins, if you were unable to save the old ones.

The type of putty will depend on whether you have a wood or metal frame. For a hardwood frame that is stained for instance, you will need mastic, but if you are not sure, ask when you buy the glass. Take a small piece of the old putty or mastic with you to help identify it.

Fitting the glass - take the putty and roll it in your hands

quickly. It is easier to use if it is taken from the bottom of the tub. Put it on a piece of newspaper and roll it with a knife for a few seconds to take out some of the oil. To stop the putty sticking to your hands, wet them slightly. When you have rolled the putty, press it into the rebate, using just enough for the new glass to rest against. Now put the glass into the rebate and press it gently around the edges.

Next put a little putty on each panel pin and press it into the rebate just in front of the glass. Placing a hammer against the glass, slide it carefully to knock in the pin just enough to hold the glass in place. Now take the rest of the putty and press it into position on the outside of the glass and rebate. Remember to use the putty from the bottom of the tub, and treat it as before.

Finishing - using the putty on other windows as an example, try to get yours to match. Use a knife to smooth it off and get it to an arrow shape in the corner. Then take off any squeezed out putty on the inside of the glass. Finally, let the putty go hard and dry for about two weeks before painting.

Services - water, gas, electricity and heating

Turn it off. Before working on any services, make sure they're turned off

Water

To turn your water supply off. You need to find the main stop tap that controls the cold water supply from the mains. This is usually under the kitchen sink, under the stairs, in a cupboard near the front door or in the cellar.
If you can't find it, ask Thames Water or Southern Water; or a plumber. If you have a leak or burst pipe, need to

change a washer on a tap or deal with a faulty ball valve, you should turn off the water supply. Depending upon the type of system you have, you may need to switch off your water heating or central heating before you turn your water off. If in doubt switch it off.
Make sure you know where to find your stop tap

Gas

Next to your meter is a square peg with a handle on it. This is where you turn the gas supply to your house on and off. If you smell gas:

- Do not light a match or cigarette lighter or turn any electrical switches on or off. It may be the last thing you do.
- Check that the smell is not from an unlit fire, heater, cooker or boiler.

If all appliances are switched off and the smell persists:

- Turn the gas supply off immediately
- Open all windows
- Call the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999

When you turn the gas on again, you may need to re-light any pilot lights to the cooker, fires or boiler.
A CORGI registered person must carry out any work to your gas pipes or appliances. Do not attempt this work yourself.

Electricity

The main electricity supply to your house can be turned off at the switch on the consumer unit or in a separate switch box nearby. The consumer unit is the box holding the fuses for your electrical system.
You will need to turn your supply off if you are doing any work to the electrical system, changing a main fuse or fuse wire or if you have a burst water pipe. Water getting on to electric wires or in sockets could cause a short circuit or

fire.
Don't overload your system by using adaptors for two or three plugs.
If you have had a burst or leaking pipe make sure that all sockets and plugs are free of water before you turn on the supply. If you have had a flood you may need to unscrew the cover of any affected sockets to make sure they are dry inside.

Hot water

There should be a separate stop tap next to your hot water cylinder or multi point water heater.
Remember to turn off the heater before turning off the hot water supply from it.

Changing a tap washer

If water leaks from the spout, this usually means the washer needs replacing. If water appears around the spindle, the packing probably needs renewing.

- Turn off the water supply at the main stop tap
- Turn on the tap to drain water from pipes
- You now need to get at the tap body.

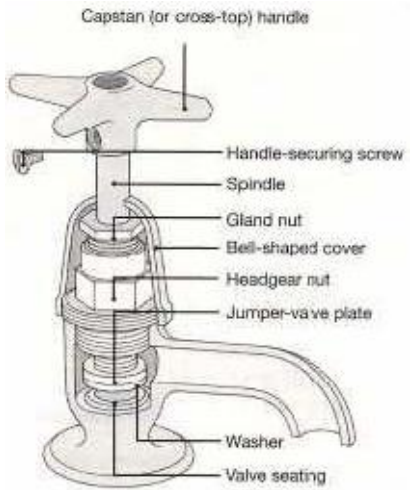
There are two basic types of tap; the old 'rising spindle' type and the modern tap:

- On the older type you need to turn the nut between the turning handle top piece and the spout. Do this using a spanner whilst holding the spout in place with a block of wood.
- On more modern taps, prise off the hot/cold marker and undo the retaining screw.

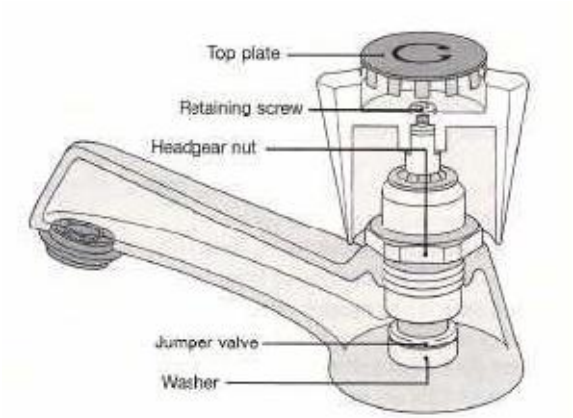
You will then be able to pull off the 'shroud'.

- Remove the old washer. Some are push-on washers over a centre point and need prising off. Others are held on with a small nut that may need loosening.

• New washers should be the same size and shape as the old one but remember that the old one may have changed shape and spread slightly over the years.
• If there is writing on one side of the new washer fit it with the writing side up or the smooth side down.
• Put the tap back together.
• If on an older type of tap the leak continues, it may be that the brass has become porous. In this case the tap should be replaced.



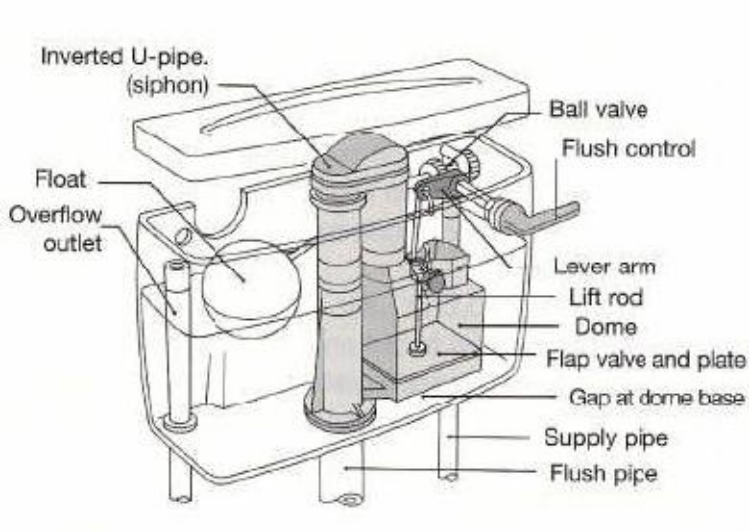
The old rising spindle tap



The modern type of tap

Overflowing cisterns

If your toilet or water tank overflow pipe is dripping, this means that the ball valve in the cistern needs adjusting. When the cistern is full the water levels should be below the overflow outlet.
When the overflow pipe is leaking the 'ball' is sitting too high in the cistern. There should be a nut on the other end of the arm from the ball that you can adjust to make the ball sit lower in the cistern. If there is no nut it may be an old type of ball valve. You should be able to bend the arm down slightly to make the ball sit lower in the cistern. If the overflow continues, the ball valve will require replacing.



Burst or leaking pipes

These can cause a lot of damage over a short period of time and so must be dealt with immediately. Leaks or bursts can happen because of frost or strained or corroded pipework.

When you detect a leak or burst:

- Find out exactly where it is happening
- Turn off the water supply
- Turn on all the cold water taps to drain the system

If the leak continues after water has stopped flowing from the taps, this could mean that the pipe is part of the central heating pipework. To empty the system use the drain off valve that is usually near the boiler. Before using the valve, make sure that the boiler is off and that all electrical switches for the central heating controls are off.

Attach a hose to the pipe on the valve and run it to a sink, bath or toilet. Turn the square peg on the valve to the left. This will open the valve and let the water drain away. You should use a spanner to do this but you can use pliers if you are careful.

Once you have drained the leaking or burst pipe you can make a temporary repair. On pipes you can use a pipe clamp and on joints and fittings use plastic putty or tape.

Unless you know how to cut and join new lengths of pipe or how to completely refill a central heating system, you should call a plumber to make a permanent repair. When turning on your water supply after a temporary repair, do not turn the stop tap fully on immediately. This will prevent the full pressure of the system causing more damage.

Central heating

In summer switch your heating system on from time to time. It will stop the pump from jamming and should ensure that it works properly in winter. If you have radiators that are cold at the top and hot at the bottom it means they have air in them which needs removing.
To do this:

- Put a radiator key, which has a square notch on it, into a slot in the top of the radiator and turn it to your left until you hear a hissing noise.
- When you get water coming from the valve turn the key to the right to shut it.

It is a good idea to have your system checked and serviced every year by a CORGI registered plumber. Any major problems should also be dealt with by an expert.

Electricity

Changing a plug

Check that the cable on your appliance is in good condition and not cut or twisted.

There will usually be two or three pieces of flex showing:

Brown = Live Blue = Neutral Green and Yellow = Earth

If you can't see the flex cut back the outer white, black or

orange outer cable until you can, but be careful not to cut the flex.
Cut away half an inch of the plastic flex covering to expose the wire underneath. Twist the wire and double it back.
Put the cable under the cord grip and unscrew the terminals. Fit the flex wires as follows:

E Green and Yellow or Green = Earth-furthest from the grip
L Brown or Red = Live-nearest the fuse
N Blue or Black = Neutral-nearest to the grip

Put the ends of the wires into the terminal holes and tighten the screws. Fit the correct fuse, screw down the cord grip and screw the cover back on.

Fuses

The fuse is a wire big enough to carry the amount of electricity used by each appliance.
If it becomes overloaded it will break and disconnect the power to your appliances.
It may also break after a long period of use.
If an electrical item suddenly stops working:
• Check that all wires are correctly fitted
• Fit a new fuse of the correct rating.
If it's still not working try the appliance in another socket. If this doesn't work, or if the new fuse blows quite quickly, it indicates there is a problem with the appliance that you should have repaired.

See that the fuse in the plug is right for the appliance:

- 3 Amp for lamps, radios, TVs and low -power items under 720W.
- 13 Amp for heaters, vacuum cleaners, kettles and higher-power items over 720 W.
- for a portable hand-tool socket, fit an RCD (Residual Current Device) adaptor.

Avoid overloading your sockets

House wiring

You may be able to do simple tasks yourself. These may include changing a cracked or broken socket or switch or changing a broken pull switch in the bathroom. If you do this, remember; turn off the electricity before doing any work. Make a sketch and notes of the position and wiring of everything when you have taken the cover off. This will help you when wiring the new socket or switch or enable you to put everything back if you are unable to fit the new one.

You do not need to tell Building Control department at Dartford Council about:

Repairs, replacements and maintenance work; or
Extra power points or lighting points or other alterations to existing circuits, except in a kitchen or bathroom, or outdoors.

You do need to tell them about most other work.

If you are not sure about this, or you have any questions, ask Building Control on 01322 343294.
If in doubt, call an electrician.

Remember:
- Do not overload sockets
- Check cables for cuts and breaks
- Do not extend a cable - buy a new one
- Unplug non- essential equipment before going to bed.

Insulation – preventing burst pipes

Pipes burst when water in them freezes and expands. When it thaws water comes pouring out and can cause extensive damage. Pipes most likely to freeze are those in your loft, in an outside toilet or a toilet or bathroom at the back of your kitchen.
Pipes - lag all pipes, including overflow pipes that are likely to freeze. You can insulate pipes with foam tubes that are cut along their length so that they can be fitted around the pipes and taped to hold them in place. If pipes in the loft are covered with loft insulation they shouldn't need any more protection.
Tanks - you can lag water tanks in the loft with pieces of loft insulation quilt tied or taped around the tank to hold it in place. Insulate the cover also. If your water tank does not have a cover you should consider replacing it with a new one. Don't put insulation under the water tank.

Loft insulation

Rolls of loft insulation material should be placed between the joints in your roof space. These come in 4 or 6 inch, (10 or 15cm), thicknesses and a total of 10 inches (250mm) is sufficient to prevent excessive heat losses through your roof - and save you money! Leave a gap where the rafters and

ceiling joists meet, as the timbers at the edge of your roof need ventilation to prevent rotting. Don't forget to insulate your roof access trap door and fit some draught proofing strip to the frame. When working in the roof space be careful to tread only on the timbers, and mind your head too!

Door and window locks and hinges

Oil all locks and hinges occasionally to keep moving parts working smoothly and prevent stresses and squeaks. Do this with WD4O or similar spray lubricant.

Screws to hinges may occasionally work loose and need tightening, although if this happens regularly it could be that the screw is too small or that the frame has split slightly.

Repair minor splits with wood filler, ensuring that the screw hole is also filled. Then re-hang the door or window using the correct size screw. More extensive splits may require part of the frame to be replaced or the hinges to be moved.

Oil locks occasionally

Plaster

You can repair small areas of damaged plaster with fillers such as Polyfilla. Remove loose plaster and clean the area

before filling. Fill minor cracks but wider cracks should have quarter to half inch (6-12mm) of plaster either side of the crack cut away before filling. Put the filler on with a filler knife and, when dry, sand down with medium, then fine sandpaper to a smooth finish.

Wallpapering

Once you have a smooth even wall, you are almost ready for wallpapering. If you have areas of new plaster or filler you may need to 'size' the walls before papering. You can buy packets of sizing at any DIY store.
Mix it with water, brush on to the walls and leave to dry. When papering, start from one of the window recesses and work your way around the room.

Floorboards

Floorboards are often loosened by the work of electricians or plumbers. When they remove nails in order to lift a board they often enlarge the nail hole through the board or split it. You may need to nail the board where the timber is good or at the next joist which will be about 18 inches, 45cm, across.
If you can't get a good nail fixing you may need to fill the holes and cracks with wood filler and then screw the board to the joint. Take care not to nail or screw into any cables or pipes that may run under the floorboards.

Do-it-yourself hazards

Don't forget the dangers to you and others when you tackle those D I Y jobs.
This booklet is designed to help you properly plan your work. It isn't a complete safety manual - there are always risks, but you can minimise them by taking a few simple precautions. Don't turn your D I Y into DYI - Doing Yourself

Injury!

Hand tools

Always use the right tool for the job - it's safer and you'll get better results. Give each one a quick check before you use it, mend broken tools right away or get another. Don't be tempted to do a temporary repair - a loose hammer head could fly off in use!

Power tools

If hiring tools, only go to a company who give out safety notes and testing reports with their equipment. Ask to be shown how the tool should be used.
If buying, look for the BEAB quality kitemark and appropriate British Standard number.
Read the maker's notes on how to use safely. Before use, check the power flex and make sure that it has the right fuse. Use a Residual Current Device for extra protection.
Wear suitable protective clothing, goggles or earplugs. Switch off after use and don't leave on the floor. Never use in damp or wet conditions.

Blowlamps

Remember that the lamp has liquefied petroleum gas under pressure inside. A small leak will produce a large amount of gas, which can burn or explode. Change cylinders outside and check for leaks, particularly at the hose connections using washing up liquid.
Remember that the blowlamp stays hot for quite a long time after use.

Ladders

Only use it on a firm level surface - ideally with someone at the bottom to steady it. Lash it at the top if possible. The

best rule to follow to set it at the safest angle is one foot out for every four feet up. If going onto the roof, attach yourself to a secure object by means of a safety harness.
Don't carry too much up a ladder and never over reach, just move the ladder to a new position. Stepladders must be properly braced. Think about your shoes before you step onto the ladder, if they easily slip, change them.

Chemicals

Many commonly used chemicals can harm. Paints, glues, cleaners, thinners,
preservatives, strippers and lubricants are poisonous. Always keep them firmly sealed in their original containers and follow manufacturer's advice carefully, particularly about mixing with other chemicals.
Don't smoke near chemicals and watch out for fumes when you use them. Keep chemicals off your hands by wearing gloves or wash them immediately after use. Keep all chemicals where children can't get them.

Wood and glass

Wear thick gloves to avoid splinters and cuts. Also, protect your eyes when working with glass or when sawing, drilling or sanding wood.
Wear sturdy shoes and criss-cross masking tape over glass when you carry it. The tape will help to hold it together.
Replace any low level glass with safety glazing - it is much stronger and breaks safer.

Asbestos

<u>Demolition of asbestos cement products</u>

Choose work methods which do not create

unnecessary dust.
Do keep the material wet wherever possible and use damp rags to wipe up
any dust.
Wear appropriate overalls, gloves and face mask.
Do not dry sweep any asbestos cement debris.
Do not use a domestic vacuum cleaner to clear up asbestos dust. Hire an
industrial vacuum cleaner that conforms to BS 5415 (H).

Removal of the waste asbestos

When disposing of asbestos cement material it should be treated as contaminated waste. You can hire an asbestos skip which you load yourself. It will be sealable when full and taken away by a licensed waste disposal company.

If you decide to dispose of the waste yourself it is best done by keeping and transporting the sheets whole. They do not need to be sealed in bags but should be wrapped in polythene or similar sheeting and disposed of as asbestos waste. If it is not possible to dispose of the sheets whole do not use cutting or grinding discs or circular saws to cut the sheets up. If it is unavoidable use a hand saw or scribe and break the sheets but only where it is absolutely necessary. Please remember that it is essential to keep the material damp whilst you are working with it. The broken sheets should be placed in heavy duty polythene bags double bagged and marked "Asbestos Waste".

The gloves overalls and masks you have been using to dismantle and handle the asbestos should also be placed in a heavy duty polythene bag and treated
as contaminated waste.

You may take the asbestos waste along to your local Kent County Council amenity tip and the controlling officer will direct you to the asbestos skip where you will be able to deposit your waste free of charge. It is always best to telephone the amenity site before you take asbestos waste along to ensure the site can accommodate the amount of waste you have in their asbestos skip.

The amenity sites in our Borough are situated at:

Rochester Way Dartford Kent Tel:- 01322–521450 and

Pepper Hill Northfleet Kent Tel:- 01474–323170

It must be remembered that it is an offence under section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to knowingly deposit controlled waste such as asbestos on unlicensed land. This Section follows the advice issued in the Health and Safety Executives Guidance HSG 189/2 Working with Asbestos Cement.

Further information can be found on the HSE websites.

Asbestos information: http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/

Employing a builder

How much care you take over the selection of a firm to carry out work for you will depend on the size of the job and how urgent it is. Whatever the size of job always:

- Write down a full description of exactly what you want doing.
- Get two written quotations for the work. A quotation is a fixed price as opposed to an estimate that is a calculation of

how much the work is likely to cost.
• Check whether VAT is included or to be added.
• Check that the builders are qualified for and capable of carrying out the work. See 'Finding a builder', below.
• Find out how long they will take and when they can do the work. Get this in writing.
• Ask about guarantees. See 'Guarantees'

For larger or more complex work you may need to:
• employ an architect or surveyor to specify and supervise the work.
• ask builders for examples of previous work and go and have a look. Talk to the builder's previous clients to check that they are satisfied.
• check membership with the organisation if a builder claims to be a member of CORGI - for gas work, lEE - for electrical work or any professional or trade organisation. If you find a builder who is making false qualification or membership claims, report them to Trading Standards Tel No 08458 247247
• agree a written contract with the chosen builder which covers price, the extent of the work, working arrangements, start and completion dates, guarantees, quality, payment arrangements, the use of power, builders insurance and what happens if extra or unforeseen work is required.
• never employ someone who calls at your home uninvited without first getting a second opinion and an alternative quote. Uninvited callers may try to persuade you that something is wrong with your house that needs urgent attention. They may say that they can do the job quickly and cheaply for cash.
Never pay anyone until you are satisfied that the job has been done properly and never trust the 'expert opinion' of someone who calls uninvited.

Finding a builder

• Dartford Council's Private Sector Renewal section maintains lists of local firms, including general builders, electricians, plumbers, roofers, plasterers and window, underpinning and highway (crossover) contractors. Copies of these lists can be obtained by telephoning 01322 343674.

• Use builders recommended by friends/relatives or

• Where registered with professional bodies or trade organisations :

1. Fair Trades, 6a The Quadrant, Hoylake, Wirral CH47 2EE 08707 384858 Web site: http://www.fairtrades.co.uk/

2. Construction Confederation 55 Tufton Street London SW1P 3QL Telephone 0870 8889090

Website: http://www.constructionconfederation.co.uk/

3. Federation of Master Builders - see Yellow Pages under Builders for individual members or phone 0207 2427583. Web site: http://www.fmb.org.uk/

4. Guild of Master Craftsmen - see Yellow Pages under Builders for individual
members or phone 01273 478449.
http://www.thegmcgroup/theguild

5. Glass & Glazing Federation - GGF - see Yellow Pages under Double Glazing for individual members or phone 020 7403 7177.
Web site: http://www.ggf.org.uk/

6. Plastic Window Federation

Federation House 85-87 Wellington Street Luton
Bedfordshire LU1 5AF
or telephone: 01582 456147
Website: www.pwfed.co.uk

7. Electrical Contractors Association - see Yellow Pages under Electricians (look for the ECA logo on adverts) or phone 01509 621234.
Web site: http://www.eca.co.uk/default.asp

8. N.I.C.E.I.C. - see Yellow Pages under Electricians for individual members or phone 0870 0130381.
Web site: http://www.niceic.org.uk/

9. CORGI - Gas - see Yellow Pages under Gas Installers for individual members or phone 0870 4012200.
Web site: http://www.corgi-gas-safety.com/

10. National Federation of Painting and Decorating Contractors, 32 Coton Rd,
Nuneaton, Warwickshire CV1 1 5TW. Tel: 024 7635 3776.
Web site: http://www.paintingdecoratingassociation.co.uk/

11. Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineers - see Yellow Pages under Plumbers for individual members or phone 01708 472791.
Web site: http://www.plumbers.org.uk/

12. National Federation of Roofing Contractors (NFRC), 24 Weymouth Street, London W1G 7LX, see Yellow Pages under Roofing (look for the NFRC logo on adverts) or phone 02074360387.
Web site: http://www.nfrc.co.uk/

13. British Wood Preserving and Damp Proofing Association, 1 Gleneagles House Vernon Gate, Derby, - see Yellow Pages under Woodworm (look for the BWPDA logo on adverts) or phone 01332 225100.
Web site: http://www.bwpda.co.uk/

14. Trustmark, Englemere, Kings Ride, Ascot, Berkshire, SL5 7TB. Tel: 0870 163 7373
Website: http://www.trustmark.org.uk/

Membership of these organisations can mean different things from simple random checks of member's work, to passing certain levels of qualification, to offering insurance under written guarantees, to an arbitration service in disputes. Find out what extra protection you are getting before you employ anyone.

Getting a quote

- Once you have arrived at a shortlist of builders to ask for a quote, contact them and ask them to visit.
- Write down exactly what you want doing and, where appropriate, take your own measurements such as plastering, ceilings, floors etc. Note how quickly the builders respond and whether they arrive on time or not.
- Note how carefully they inspect or survey for the work required. Did they take any measurements? Did they look for the possible routes of cables or pipes that may be in the way and need moving? Did they take the time to really find out what you want or what the problem might be?
- Ask them when you can expect the quote to be sent and note whether it arrives on time or not.
- Ask how long the job will take and how soon after your agreement they can start work.
- Ask whether the work will be guaranteed, for how long

and whether the guarantees are insurance underwritten to remedy defects in the event of the builder going out of business.

• All these factors will help you decide whether you have confidence in a builder to carry out the work quickly and efficiently with as little risk of things going wrong as possible. If you do not have that confidence in any of the builders you have selected then find someone else. This may take more time but your peace of mind is worth it in the end.

• The final piece of the selection process is the price. If the quote is too high, it may be worth talking to the builder to see if there is any way that costs can be cut.

• There may be a cheaper, if less satisfactory way of doing a job. You may have to forego those gold plated taps in favour of plain plastic ones!

Before work starts

Meet your builder again and agree:

• Start and finish dates and which areas of the house need clearing of furniture, carpets and curtains.

• The condition of any fixtures and fittings and surfaces that should be left undisturbed. If the builder damages anything, he should carry out all the necessary repairs.

• The times of the day work can be done and whether the builder can work weekends or not.

• When payment is to be made and how. On larger jobs, the builder may request 'interim' payments for items of work that have been fully completed. You may also 'retain' 5% of the total cost for three to six months to make sure that the builder returns to any defects that become apparent after you have moved back in.

• The completion date and the amount of your costs each week that the builder should pay if your house is not ready

to move back into by then. For example, if you are paying rent. If you order extra work it is reasonable to expect the completion date to be extended without penalty.
• What to do if you require extra work or something unforeseen happens. Always get a price, in writing, for extra work before it is done. Make sure instructions to carry out extra work are in writing.
• Who is to pay for power used in the work? If the builder is paying, make sure you both read the meter when work starts and when it is complete.

Write down all these agreements and both you and the builder sign it. This is your contract

• If you have to move out or no one will be at home while work is going on, check whether your house and contents insurances are still valid. If they are not valid, check that the builder's insurance will give you adequate cover.

Once work starts

Unless you have agreed otherwise, it will generally be your responsibility to move any carpets, curtains or furniture. Your builder needs space to work. If he has to wait for things to be moved, the job may take longer and cost more. Make a daily note of what has been done and the weather conditions. These notes will help resolve any difficulties if you find yourself in dispute with your builder. The weather may affect the timetable for the job. For example, work to paths, gardens or roofs cannot be done if there is a foot of snow on the ground.
Concrete can't be laid if the temperature is below freezing and work on a slate roof may be very difficult in a heatwave. Under exceptional weather conditions it is reasonable for the completion date to be extended, without

penalty, if it affected the progress of the work.
Unless you know what you are looking for, there is no point checking any item of work until the builder says it is finished. Very often the finishing touches will be left until the end. Make notes of items you are not happy about and check them off as they are made good. Only make the final payment once you are completely satisfied. Make sure you get a receipt and any promised guarantees.

Guarantees

There are numerous guarantees available to you. How good they are will depend on the type, length of time and any restrictions or maintenance clauses.

Types of guarantee

Company - this is issued by the company carrying out the work or providing goods and is valid for the period of the guarantee providing the company stays in business. This guarantee will usually cost you nothing but, as even the biggest and longest established companies can go out of business, there is some element of risk.
Insurance backed - with this type of guarantee you are provided with insurance against the company going bankrupt or that if a problem arises the insurance company takes responsibility for sorting it out. This may cost you a small premium or fee.
Professional association backed - members of some trade organisations will issue guarantees backed by that organisation. These will usually provide cover if the builder goes bankrupt and may also offer arbitration in the event of a dispute with your builder. Again, there may be a small premium or fee to pay.
Length of time - this will depend on the reasonable life expectancy of the materials or goods provided. A new slate

or tile roof should last for 30 years or more, a damp proof course and UPVC windows 10 years, for example. Flat roofs will not be expected to last as long.
Restrictions and maintenance clauses - read your guarantees carefully. There may be clauses that require you to have an appliance regularly serviced or to clean surfaces in a particular way. Keep any instruction manuals and make sure you use goods properly. If you do anything which is likely to cause short or long term damage your guarantee may not remain valid.

Defective work

Guaranteed work - if you find a defect to something which is guaranteed, write to the company stating your complaint and giving any other relevant information such as when the work took place, guarantee number and any other details. Send a copy to your builder, if different, and keep a copy yourself. If the defect is not remedied within a reasonable time, despite further letters and phone calls, you may need to consult the Citizens Advice Bureau, Trading Standards or a solicitor.
Other work - agree with your builder the period after the work is complete in which they will return to remedy defects. Any repairs required after this period may mean the builder charging for the work. It is important that it is clearly stated who is responsible for what work and when.

Paying for the work – finding the money

The easiest way of paying for the work is from your own savings. If you don't have enough savings for the work you require there are several other options available.

Have the work done in stages - split the work into stages and get it done when you can afford it. Your builder may

revise their quotes as time passes.

Borrow the amount required - home improvement loans are available from banks, building societies and other financial institutions.

Re-mortgage the property - if your house is paid for, you may be able to take out a loan on the property which is backed by an endowment life insurance policy.

Care and Repair Scheme - this is an agency sponsored by Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Council that can help people 60 and over with repairs to their homes. The scheme can advise on specifying work, finding builders and may also be able to find different ways for you to fund the work, by way of grant, loan or equity release. They will charge a service fee so the overall cost will be higher but this may be recoverable if any grant eligibility exists. A handyperson service is available for small repair items. Telephone 01474 566283 for details.

Energy Efficiency Grants - people who claim benefits can access help with home insulation and heating system improvements. New heating systems are available to people over 60 who are claiming certain benefits.

Energy efficiency discount schemes are available to all residents. For all enquiries call Kent Energy Centre on 0800 358 6669.

Insurance - if the work is as a result of an accident or subsidence, you can claim costs from your building insurance - see ‘Making an insurance claim'.

Local Authority Housing Grants - if your house has never had an inside toilet, is structurally unsound or adaptations are required because a disabled person is living in your house, you may be eligible for a grant towards the cost of the work. For more information or phone Dartford Borough Council Private Sector Renewal Team on 01322 343379.

In an emergency

If you smell gas - open windows, do not switch lights or sockets on or off, don't light a match or lighter, put out cigarettes, check that all gas appliances are off. Turn the gas off at the meter and call the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999 - 24 hr. service.

Leaking/burst pipes - turn off the water at the mains stop tap and turn all taps on to drain the system. Call a plumber.

Flooded cellar - usually happens after prolonged heavy rain. This will drain away naturally but the Fire Service may, for a fee, pump water away.

Flooded house - flood water will recede naturally. If a flood is imminent, move as many of your belongings upstairs as you can. Contact your house building insurers about any damage to the building or permanent fixtures and fittings. Quite a lot of cellars have standing water for long periods of time, or even permanently. It usually costs a great deal of money to make a cellar reasonably dry and it is rarely worth the trouble and expense involved.

Sewage water getting into the cellar is a more serious problem. Often this is just a blocked drain that has been left for some time, but occasionally there may be a cracked pipe that is leaking.

Call the Council's Environmental Services on 01322 343255 who will advise you what to do.

Blocked drains - see section on 'Drains and sewers'.
Storm or fire damage - as soon as you are able, make your house secure and weather proof. You may need to board up broken windows or get a builder to put a tarpaulin over the roof. Contact your house building insurers for advice. If the damage is so severe that you can't live in it until repairs are done, you may need emergency accommodation.
Telephone 0845 634 1212 -out of office hours or 01322 343800 - during office hours.
Structural cracks in walls - the sudden appearance of cracks in walls may be worrying but, in most cases, they are not an immediate danger. Contact your house building insurers.

Making an insurance claim

Make sure you know what you are insured against. If your house suffers damage that will be rectified by your insurers, make notes as soon as you can. Note how and when the damage happened and, if relevant, the weather conditions at the time.
If criminals, such as a burglar, caused the damage you must report the matter to the police and get a crime number to give to your insurance company. If the damage was caused by a third party, such as a car crashing into your house, you must get that person's insurance details.
Take photos of the damage. It is a good idea to take photographs of your house and contents before there is a problem. You can then show your insurers what the house or goods were like before you needed to make a claim.
Contact your insurance company and tell them what has happened. They will either send you a claim form or send an assessor to visit you and see the damage. Your insurers

will tell you what to do next. You may have to get quotes or just get the job done and send them the invoice or receipt.

Security and safety

Doors - when replacing locks fit a 5-lever deadlock and security bolts to your doors and a security chain and spy-hole to your front door.

Windows - fit window locks to your windows. These are available in a variety of types. The best ones are those that require a key to open them. Make sure you know where to find the keys so you can escape in an emergency.

Means of access - you are less likely to be burgled if access to the rear of your house is restricted. Persuade all those who are served by a common access to contribute towards a gate that can be locked.

Fire protection and means of escape

Smoke alarms - fit smoke alarms upstairs and downstairs on your route out of the house. These will give you enough warning to escape before a fire really takes hold. Don't forget to test them regularly to make sure they are working properly.

Party walls in attics - make sure there is no gap in the wall in the attic between your roof space and those next door. This will stop roof fires spreading.

Know your escape plan - think through how everyone in the house will escape if there was a fire. Wherever the fire is make sure everyone, even children, know what to do when the alarm goes off, especially at night.

Don't let burglars know you are out. Leave a light on if you go out and are leaving the house empty at night. When you go away on holiday cancel the milk and papers and

have a neighbour move the post to where it can't be seen from the door or windows.
Adopting all or some of these measures may enable you to obtain a discount from your house and contents insurances.

Homesafe is a free service operating across Kent which aims to help people feel safe and secure in their own homes by carrying out security works and minor aids and adaptations. Email communitysafetyunit@kent.gov.uk or telephone 08458 247247.

Extra help and advice

Energy Efficiency

Dartford Borough Council is committed to promoting energy conservation in its own housing stock and within the private sector. For free, impartial advice on energy saving measures, and information on grants and discounts available click on this link:

http://www.dartford.gov.uk/services/Housing/energy_efficiency.htm

or contact the Kent Energy Centre on: 0800 358 6669
or the Council's Home Energy Conservation Officer on: 01322 343056

DIY

Most of the DIY chains now produce 'how to' leaflets to help you tackle a range of home improvement works yourself. If they don't have a leaflet, they may have an expert on hand to offer advice or be able to tell you who to get in touch

with.
A comprehensive range of books is obtainable from most good bookshops and library services.

Disputes with builders
Contact any trade or professional organisation which your builder is a member of. If you think you have been treated unfairly or dishonestly contact the KCC Trading Standards on 08458 247247. For other disputes that can't be resolved by negotiation, you may have to contact the Citizens Advice Bureau, telephone 01322 224686 or a solicitor.

Online advice - there are a number of websites that provide much more detailed instruction and tips:

www.diynot.com have hundreds of information pages that go into great detail on subjects including decorating, electrics, floors and stairs, home security, insulation, outdoor projects, plumbing, roofing and guttering, safety, tools and materials, windows and doors and woodwork.

www.diyprojects.info is where you can see information about a whole range of DIY projects.

www.diyfixit.co.uk is another site with hundreds of pages of DIY tips as well as advice on insurance and safety.

www.diydoctor.org.uk not only provides information on how to do a wide range of tasks but has useful advice for planning and carrying out a DIY or maintenance project.

www.seniority.co.uk is a web community that includes pages dedicated to DIY and maintenance projects. All articles

are written by readers and are based on their own experiences.

www.teachmediy.co.uk is a commercial site for Knauf building products but it does contain animated teaching sessions for a range of skills including plastering and putting up partitions and coving and dry lining walls.

www.doityourself-directory.co.uk is a commercial site with a selected directory of UK Do It Yourself links

Feedback

Your views are welcome. Please contact Kevin Croghan of the Council's Private Sector Renewal team on 01322 343479 to tell us how useful you have found this guide or let us know how you think we can improve it. Kevin.croghan@dartford.gov.uk

Copies of this guide are available free of charge to householders living in Dartford.

Dartford Borough Council acknowledges the help of Derby City Council in the preparation of this guide.