



UK HOUSE PRICES INCREASED BY 1% IN JUNE AND WERE 11.8% HIGHER THAN JUNE 2013 Source: Nationwide House Price Index



## MAINTENANCE

# THE CHALLENGES OF MAINTAINING CHURCH CONVERSIONS

**Julian Davies** looks at Planned Maintenance Programmes

### CHURCH CONVERSIONS

can pose a unique set of maintenance challenges for landlords, leaseholders and managing agents.

English weather alongside standard wear and tear mean that all buildings deteriorate over time. Churches, usually built in large expanses with exposed sections of stone and brickwork, often deteriorate faster and require significant additional maintenance and upkeep.

Many have steep pitched roofs, with associated turrets and towers. Their intricate design often requires complicated provision for discharge of rainwater, with awkward gutter and downpipe combinations terminating into gullies, leaving limited access for routine clearing and maintenance. Blockages are common, leading to saturation of

masonry elements, exacerbating deterioration and causing internal damp.

External walls provide further challenges, their stone and brickwork often affected by years of rainwater run-off. Ornate buttresses, carvings and intricate window details mean a small quantity of damage can create high costs. Original church windows tend to be single-glazed (creating issues minimising drafts and noise) and with coloured glass mounted in lead cames, which can be difficult to replace and costly to repair.

Often, historic church buildings have suffered from poor maintenance and repair methods (prior to, and even during, conversion) exacerbating deterioration and damage. For example: the use of cement pointing, which does not breathe,

causes unnecessary corrosion of surrounding masonry. There are specific solutions for these issues. However, the key lesson is to implement an ongoing Planned Maintenance Programme (PMP) for the building.

This is not just because of the materials used, but also the size and complexity of the building. A few loose roof tiles may require extensive temporary access (scaffolding) to effect repairs. The access cost will often dwarf the amount of work required, so all maintenance, repairs, preventative work and decoration should take place while scaffolding is in place.

The first step in a PMP is for the surveyor to produce a detailed survey of the building, prioritise immediate work and assess future maintenance and repairs. This will be presented within a repair

cycle with a maintenance cost plan. It will incorporate a category rating for work type (eg Health and Safety, Routine Maintenance, Improvements) and account for lease requirements and building fabrics.

The key is to develop a programme of maintenance that is comprehensive, well organised and affordable. The PMP will enable those responsible to set realistic service charges and reserve fund expenditure to meet future costs.

Church conversions are beautiful places to live. A detailed PMP will ensure that leaseholders and landlords can enjoy the benefits, while minimising the threat of nasty and costly surprises.

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