

Why planned maintenance is more important than ever

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant many plans have been put on hold for the best part of two years — from holidays and weddings to business conferences and other economic activity — and the property sector is no exception.



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The impact of lockdown in March 2020 was immediate, as face-to-face meetings were cancelled or went online, and many planned projects were postponed. People adapted quickly to the new normal, and despite many setbacks, there has been a gradual return to business more or less as usual. Arguably, though, the longer-term effects of the pandemic will have an even greater effect on the industry.

The key problem is that while maintenance and renovation plans can be put on hold, the natural deterioration of buildings cannot. Day-to-day wear and tear, and the ravages of the weather, mean all buildings develop problems over time and have to be maintained carefully to keep them fully functional. Changes to legislation, statutory requirements and the leases

between landlord and tenant, also affect the standards by which properties are judged. So those responsible for looking after them also have to be cognisant of those standards and take steps to maintain them over time.

Postponed maintenance works and reduced inspections as a result of the pandemic mean many property managers are now playing catch-up. And many have little choice but to prioritise fire safety works — remediation of combustible cladding, for example, and the costs associated with that. Add to that the impact on budgets caused by the Covid downturn itself — not least because many leaseholders have struggled to pay service charges — and it's obvious that the long-term effects are going to be significant.

In this context, some property managers might be tempted to save costs any way they can. That's why it is vital to understand which expenses are optional or can be postponed, and which are not, and cannot. Planned maintenance programmes, or PMPs, fall very much into the latter category.

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In fact, a good PMP will actually save money — and time — in the long run. That's because the best way to avoid significant deterioration in the state of your building is not to hesitate in correcting expensive repairs, but to put in place a clear, long-term set of measures to keep it in prime condition efficiently and affordably.

A PMP is a vital tool to help managing agents or property owners set reliable levels of service charge expenditure or reserve funds for the cost of future repair and maintenance of a building. And equally, it helps clarify priorities and enables effective 'triage' at those times like now when budgets are tight.

A PMP covers everything from exterior refurbishment works and the redecoration of common parts to gutter clearing and fire door checks. While some elements may seem mundane, the cumulative effects can be hugely beneficial. A comprehensive PMP can also help avoid disputes between the various leaseholders responsible for paying for maintenance, which in turn mitigates the need for expensive conflict resolution.

The best person to put an effective PMP in place is a Chartered Building Surveyor. They will have the knowledge and experience to draw up an accurate schedule of works that will identify any repairs that needs to be done urgently and pinpoint future maintenance issues. The process begins with

10 key PMP benefits

1. Brings to your attention areas of immediate concern
2. Ongoing compliance with lease obligations
3. Proactive maintenance, minimising the need for emergency and reactive call-outs
4. Greater control over expenditure and reduced risk of future spikes
5. Matching reserve fund contributions to an actual cost schedule rather than guesswork
6. Maintaining the underlying value of the property
7. Sustaining high standards and presentation of the building
8. Minimising disputes, as the PMP is clearly communicated to all stakeholders
9. Can include actions from fire risk assessments and assistance in achieving fire safety compliance
10. Apartments are more attractive to prospective buyers when there is a long-term expenditure plan in place

a detailed survey of the building, so that any necessary work on the building can be prioritised and combined, creating economies of scale in terms of fixed costs like scaffolding. If you provide your surveyor with a copy of the lease, they can also search out the landlord's covenants in respect of cyclical works frequencies and reflect these in their schedule.



The surveyor's plan for maintaining the building will include anticipated costs over time — typically 10 to 20 years depending on client preferences — allowing the property manager to budget accordingly and avoid any spikes in expenditure

Depending on the size of the property, the cost of a detailed long-term plan and cost schedule will vary, but the financial benefits will be immediately obvious. The surveyor's plan for maintaining the building will include anticipated costs over time — typically 10 to 20 years depending on client preferences — allowing the property manager to budget accordingly and avoid any spikes in expenditure.

The cost schedule should include for an opening reserve fund balance and yearly collection amounts too, so property managers can track the year-on-year funding requirements and ensure the building does not go into the red.

In most cases, the savings from such a strategic approach to spending on maintenance will more than pay for the cost of the PMP itself. Once this framework is in place, property managers and their clients will be able to monitor and update the PMP regularly, and a review by a surveyor should only be necessary once every two or three years.

A PMP is an essential part of a property manager's toolkit come rain or shine, in good times or bad. And in the wake of the pandemic, it is more valuable than ever ■

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