

## 11

### Buying Time

#### 1 Introduction

All buildings deteriorate over time unless subject to careful attention. The preservation of a historic building therefore requires regular maintenance and timely repair which should, ideally, be based on a planned programme of preventative conservation implemented in accordance with a prioritised schedule. Good advice and guidance on effective maintenance is readily available in the *Inform* and *Short Guides*<sup>1</sup> issued by Historic Scotland, the publications of English Heritage and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings<sup>2</sup> (SPAB) and in the joint SPAB/Institute of Historic Building Conservation booklet *a Stitch in Time*. There is also the education and training in the work of the City Heritage Trusts and associated with initiatives such as Conservation Area Renewal Schemes (CARS) and The Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). The THI for Kelso, Scottish Borders, for instance, includes Building Watch, a voluntary scheme to support a long-term preventative approach to maintenance of the built environment of the town that is intended to serve as a model for other places in the Scottish Borders and beyond. More recently there has been the introduction of the Stirling Traditional Buildings Health Check Scheme (TBHCS), a five year pilot being run in partnership between Historic Scotland and Stirling City Heritage Trust with additional funding from CITB Construction Skills. This will trial a building maintenance programme for traditional buildings within the Stirling City boundary. The service will offer members a regular, affordable comprehensive building fabric inspection during which emergency small-scale repairs can be undertaken. A building report will be produced for the owner, with a prioritised list of maintenance and repair issues to promote, encourage and facilitate proactive building care.

However, buildings included on the at risk register, whether due to a lack of care in the past or for other reasons, are already highly vulnerable and will inevitably suffer further or accelerated decline without deliberate intervention beyond routine repair and maintenance. In many cases the owner's response to risk is to place the building out of sight and out of mind or, at best, 'on hold' while its future is decided or promoted. Even where there are good prospects of rescue, effective negotiation, marketing, acquisition, investigation, project development, community engagement, gaining consents, funding and implementation all take considerable time during which it is important to give due regard to the physical needs of the building's fabric. It is therefore crucial to consider steps to prevent or slow down any downward spiral of deterioration.

While there is no specific obligation on the owner of a listed building to maintain it, there are obligations in relation to public safety and a duty of care the health and safety of visitors and

---

<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/learning/freepublications>

<sup>2</sup> For example: *The Good Maintenance Guide* and *Old House Handbook* available at <http://www.spab.org.uk/publications>

occupiers. There are also statutory powers for local authorities, addressed in detail in other parts of the Toolkit, that can apply where listed buildings have deteriorated. These include the facility for the planning authority, or Scottish Ministers, to carry out preventative works to limit deterioration and urgent works for the preservation of listed buildings in their area<sup>3</sup> (Toolkit text 12 *The Urgent Works Notice*). Planning authorities are encouraged to use these powers not only at the point where deterioration is so far advanced that without emergency intervention irretrievable loss is inevitable, but preferably at earlier stages when relatively inexpensive works can halt a building's deterioration and greatly improve its chances of economic re-use. Planning authorities are also encouraged to use the power to undertake works of temporary support such as scaffolding or a temporary roof covering on a continuing basis. The provision erection of temporary measures can often afford a useful breathing space in which the future of the building can be properly considered. Expensive permanent repairs should not be undertaken using these powers. Works undertaken should normally be those designed to limit deterioration by keeping a building wind and weatherproof, by providing necessary structural support in cases of potential danger or preventing damage by vandals.

The planning authority can also serve a notice (Toolkit text 13 *The Repairs Notice*) specifying the works considered reasonably necessary for the proper preservation of a building and pointing out that if the requirements of the repairs notice are not carried out, proceedings to acquire the building compulsorily may be started.<sup>4</sup> Normally planning authorities only serve such notices where they are firmly committed to compulsory acquisition failing satisfactory action by the owner although council authority to proceed with action can often be enough to stimulate repairs or disposal.

While it is realistic to expect that at any time no more than a few problem structures might be tackled using such powers, simply ignoring and allowing all other buildings at risk to deteriorate until it is necessary for the local authority to intervene is neither appropriate nor satisfactory. Owners, agents and responsible bodies should therefore consider other proactive steps to buy time to ensure that buildings are kept in such a condition that their future might be properly addressed. In some cases there will be a need for very urgent or emergency works in response to a catastrophic event or initial discovery of a problem while in others there may be a need for a more measured approach using interim management and repair. In many situations a longer-term planned strategy for managed vacancy ('mothballing') or a temporary use might be appropriate. In most cases it is best to be realistic and recognise that building solutions are rarely found quickly and to plan for possible vacancy over a long period.

## 2 Emergency and Immediate Works

In the event of a catastrophic event, such as a fire or structural collapse, there will inevitably be an urgent need for taking down or securing the fabric of all or part of a building. In such circumstances it is crucial that expert advice is sought and that the works are the minimum necessary without affecting the character of the building unnecessarily. It is important that following damage the building is not left in a state that leads to further threat and deterioration. Even small steps can be better than nothing. For instance, mineral felt might be applied to a roof where slates or lead have been lost or propping introduced where a part has failed.

---

<sup>3</sup> Section 49 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 and Historic Environment (Amendment)(Scotland) Act 2011 paragraph 25.

<sup>4</sup> Sections 42-45 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997.

# Buildings at Risk Toolkit 11

Every situation will be different, as should be the response to it, as demonstrated in the following examples:

## **Example: Star and Garter Hotel, Linlithgow, West Lothian**

After extensive fire damage the walls were made secure with steelwork and the remainder of the roof and internal floors removed. The wallheads were protected from the weather through the application of heavy-duty plastic sheeting. This kept the building stable for a considerable period while insurance, planning and marketing was undertaken.

## **Example: Blackburn House, West Lothian**

Exquisite hand modelled plaster ceilings were in danger of total collapse but were saved by supporting them from underneath using old carpets laid on scaffold boards on metal props. This rapid and inexpensive method held the plaster in place for over a decade and enabled its subsequent restoration.

## **Example: Finavon Doocot, Angus**

Following collapse the masonry wall of Scotland's largest doocot, the structure was shored with timber buttresses by its guardian the National Trust for Scotland.

## **Example: From Boathouse, Leith Hall, Aberdeenshire**

In response to a seriously decayed and failing shingle roof a temporary membrane cover was applied to the single storey structure to protect the structural timbers until funds can be secured for repair works.

A small number of local authorities in England the conservation specialist is a member of the councils 24-hour emergency call out plan. The aim of this is to attend emergencies at short notice and offer on-the-spot professional advice to building control officers and fire officers on the safeguarding of the historic fabric.

There may be situations where the local authority (or perhaps another responsible body) is of the opinion that the only means to ensure the survival of a building or a part of it would be to intervene immediately and without first obtaining listed building consent. For instance, this might be appropriate where a building contains fixtures or fittings that are vulnerable to theft while it is left vacant. Under the provisions of section 8(3) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 it can be a defence against the offence of undertaking unauthorised works to a listed building to prove that works to the building were urgently necessary in the interests of safety or health or for the preservation of the building, that it was not practical to proceed by works of repair or works providing temporary support and shelter and that the works carried out were limited to the minimum measures immediately necessary. Such a defence is dependent on notice in writing justifying in detail the carrying out of the works being given to the planning authority as soon as reasonably practicable. Obviously, this should only be employed in extreme circumstances and under the instruction of responsible persons.

**Example: Redundant Churches, Glasgow**

In the 1970s a large number of stained glass windows were 'rescued' from churches in Glasgow that were sitting vacant while their futures were being considered. The items were held in council museums stores. Without such action many outstanding works would have been lost.

**Example: Drylaw House, Edinburgh**

This mansion became vacant at very short notice leaving it vulnerable to forced entry, theft and damage. Conservation staff from the local planning authority entered the building with a joiner and removed over mantle paintings. These were taken to the council art gallery where they were kept in secure and environmentally appropriate storage until such times as it was felt safe to allow the items to be returned to their original location. The joiner also ensured that the building was lock safe.

### 3 Holding and phased Necessary Works

A very large number of buildings at risk currently receive little or no attention. However, responsible owners never adopt a 'do nothing' approach and see the benefits of proactive intervention to hold the building's condition or, better still, of undertaking phased improvements as resources allow. As such works are planned on a building by building basis, it is difficult to offer detailed guidance and tools for action beyond a few sound steps and illustrative examples. Nevertheless, the basic considerations of making a building water, wind and vandal proof always hold good. Steps should also be taken to minimise visible signs of vacancy which can give out the message that the owners have given up interest, thus inviting unauthorised access, theft and damage. Enhanced security through renewed locks is another an obvious step and physical barriers can be important too, although ugly barbed wire or clumsy boarding can simply the draw the attention of unwanted visitors. Forensic marking of materials vulnerable to theft, although only of use after the event, should also be considered. Valuable fixtures and fittings should be removed, with appropriate consent, and all parts of the building recorded and the record dated. At the very least the record should be a basic photographic one. Additional photographs should be taken on every subsequent visit to the site.

**Example: Earlstoun Castle, St John's Town of Dalry, Dumfries and Galloway**

This mid 16th Century L-shaped Tower House is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Category A listed building. It was in the care of a family trust but had fallen into disrepair and disuse. Adjacent former stables were previously used as a sawmill, and these too were no longer required. The Vivat Trust have become involved in proposals for the future re-use of the Castle as a short term holiday including conversion of the former sawmill to fully accessible accommodation. The Trust is planning a conversion project and is seeking grant funding to assist with the necessarily high costs of the repair work to buildings. In 2011 the Trust completed wind and watertight works and is now seeking funds for phase two of the project that will restore the 17th century panelling and complete the internal historic conservation works. It will take another two phases to complete the overall project to a position where the Trust can welcome staying guests.

## **Example: St Margaret's Braemar, Aberdeenshire**

The survival of this redundant listed church was under threat when the roof beam ends failed. The Scottish Redundant Churches Trust gained funds from the Scottish Churches Architectural Heritage Trust that allowed propping work to be undertaken. The supports have remained in place while the future of the building has been deliberated over and events demonstrating its potential use as an arts centre held.

## **Example: Kildrummy Church, Aberdeenshire**

The ceilings of this redundant church have been held in place by unsightly, yet effective, temporary plasterboard allowing occasional use of the building.

## **Example: Lion Chambers, Glasgow<sup>5</sup>**

The large urban building is in considerable need of attention and a new use but benefits from scaffold and mesh designed to retain its failing exterior as the future of the building is being considered.

## **Example: Tibbermore, Perth and Kinross**

In the care of the Scottish Redundant Churches Trust, which has owned the building since 2001, this church is in poor condition and without power, heat or lighting. Occasional events are held there while future options for the building are explored and deterioration is held in check by regular patching of the slate roof.

## 4 Mothballing

The term 'mothballing' is applied to the management regime whereby a building is kept unused yet safe and protected until key stages in its future restoration and use are assured. However, there is no agreed standard definition of what this might, or should, involve. Helpfully, there is some literature around this area offering valuable guidance based on good practice. This is summarised here in some detail and those considering mothballing schemes would most likely wish to build their strategies using a selection of the techniques featured.

English Heritage has published a comprehensive guide for owners for mothballing vacant historic buildings.<sup>6</sup> It is also available in a summary version<sup>7</sup>. The guidance covers the following main headings:

### ***Vacant Historic Buildings. An owner's guide to temporary uses, maintenance and mothballing.***

- Reviewing options and planning strategically
- Taking stock of the building
- Making the building secure

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/details/897874>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/vacanthistoricbuildings/acc-vacant-historic-buildings.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/vacanthistoricbuildings-summary/acc-vacant-historic-buildings-summary.pdf>

- Investigating the potential for temporary uses
- Carrying out urgent repairs
- Protecting vulnerable features
- Protecting the building from fire
- Carrying out regular inspections and maintenance
- Deciding what to do about building services
- Keeping the building dry and well-ventilated
- Preventing damage from vegetation
- Insurance
- Preventing damage and risks to health from wildlife
- Ensuring familiarity and compliance with regulations and legislation
- Ensuring with compliance with rates and tax obligations

There is also a valuable guide, *Mothballing buildings: Proactive maintenance and conservation on a reduced budget* by Tim Hutton and Huw Lloyd and published on the website of Hutton + Rostron Environmental Investigations Ltd.<sup>8</sup> Aware of the current recession and sluggish property market, the authors talk of the building equivalent of the ‘poverty trap’ as maintenance programmes are being curtailed at the same time that reduced occupancy is putting buildings at increased risk. Mainly written concerning timber decay it offers invaluable advice based on a few simple and inexpensive measures to remove the environmental conditions required for destructive organisms to flourish. These are intended to put the building environment and structure into a ‘virtuous spiral’, no matter what state it is already in. The time gained then becomes valuable as this can be used to dry the structure and eliminate decay. Great emphasis is placed on the danger of not getting small maintenance tasks done, whether because of budget constraints or simply through inadequate organisational and contractual arrangements. Vacancy and reduced occupancy are identified as threats as these can encourage unauthorised access, theft and build up of debris and remove day to day attention and monitoring. Malicious damage can allow water penetration, theft and arson and often where steps are taken to make the building secure, boarding up can exacerbate already poor ventilation that leads to retention of moisture and decay. Defective roof drainage, whether through leaks, loss of lead, blockage or overflow will inevitably lead to serious dampness as will plumbing leaks and burst pipes. Feral pigeons and plant growth can also cause problems. A number of practical steps are offered although it is suggested that ensuring subsequent monitoring and management is perhaps the most important, if perhaps the most challenging part of conserving a neglected building. The use of specialist consultants and contractors is advised and in all cases there should be programmed inspections that consider the key factors discussed above.

In addition to this detailed advice, the authors recommend six very simple and cost effective measures that can be taken in unoccupied or under occupied buildings whatever their current state of neglect. These can be summarised as:

- Inspect and clear roof drainage systems at least twice a year;
- Ensure ventilation through all windows, internal doors and hatches;
- Remove all floor coverings and rubbish;
- Raise floorboards along external walls and in damp areas;

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.handr.co.uk/literature/mothballing.htm>

# Buildings at Risk Toolkit 11

- Turn off and drain all unnecessary plumbing; and
- Open all window shutters and reveals and soffits if damp.

The authors suggest that in the absence of advice from expert consultants, even the partial application of these measures will significantly reduce the damage caused by damp and decay. In their opinion, there are compelling financial, environmental and cultural arguments for all professionals involved with conservation to undertake an urgent campaign to bring these policies to the attention of property owners and the building industry generally.

The National Park Service of the US Department of the Interior has published an advice note *Preservation Brief 31: Mothballing Historic Buildings*<sup>9</sup> on the steps needed to 'de-activate' a property for an extended period of time. This encourages the involvement of a multi-disciplinary team (typically an architect, historian, conservation specialist, engineer and contractor) working to a careful plan. The guide suggests nine steps for the proper mothballing of a building, each of which is considered in detail:

- Document the architectural and historic significance of the building;
- Prepare a condition assessment of the building;
- Structurally stabilise the building, based on a professional condition assessment;
- Exterminate or control pests, including termites and rodents;
- Protect the exterior from moisture penetration;
- Secure the building and its component features to reduce vandalism and break-ins;
- Provide adequate ventilation to the interior;
- Secure or modify utilities and mechanical systems; and
- Develop and implement a maintenance and monitoring plan for protection.

There is some technical guidance including methods for boarding windows with plywood panels to avoid damaging the frame and sash, such as bringing the upper and lower sashes to the middle point of the opening before installing pre-cut 150mm painted marine plywood panels (presumably drilled with ventilation holes) using long carriage bolts anchored into horizontal wooden bracing on the inside face. A mothballing checklist is included to assist in reviewing plans and, although devised from the United States, it is still useful:

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/31-mothballing.htm>

## *Preservation Brief 31: Mothballing Historic Buildings*

- Is the building watertight?
- Do the gutters retain their proper pitch and are they clean?
- Are down pipes intact and flowing?
- Are drains obstructed?
- Are windows, doors and their frames in good condition?
- Are masonry walls in good condition and watertight?
- Is external timber cladding in good condition?
- Is the site properly graded for water run-off?
- Is vegetation cleared from around the building foundations to avoid trapping moisture?
- Have nests/pests been removed from the building's interior and eaves?
- Are adequate screens in place to guard against pests?
- Has the building been inspected and treated for insects, rodents etc.?
- If toxic droppings are present have specialists been engaged for their removal?
- Have the following been removed from the interior: rubbish, inflammable liquids, poisons, paints and containers with liquids?
- Is the interior broom-clean?
- Have furnishings and fittings been removed to a safe location?
- Have remaining furniture and fittings been properly protected from dust, pests, moisture, ultraviolet light, and other potentially harmful hazards?
- Have significant architectural elements that have been detached from the building been labelled and stored in a safe place?
- Is there a building file?
- Have fire and police been notified that the building will be mothballed?
- Are there smoke and fire detectors and are they in working order?
- Are the exterior doors and windows securely fastened?
- Are plans in place to monitor the building on a regular basis?
- Are the keys to the building in a secure but accessible location?
- Are the grounds being maintained and kept from becoming overgrown?
- Have utility companies disconnected/shut off or fully inspected their lines?
- If the building will not remain heated, have water pipes been drained?
- If the electricity is to be left on is the wiring in a safe condition?
- Have steps been taken to ensure proper ventilation of the building?
- Have interior doors been left open for ventilation purposes?
- Has the secured building been checked in the last 3 months for interior dampness or excessive humidity?

The guidance also includes recommended maintenance checklists for use at different intervals of 1-3 months, every 6 months (spring and autumn) and every 12 months.

The following schedule, extracted from a proposal for a mothballing scheme for a public building in the United States, is from a real life example is also a useful checklist:



## **Example: A Town Hall, New England, USA**

### **Scope of Condition Assessment Services for Mothballing Building Conservation:**

Provide all equipment, materials and tools necessary to evaluate structural systems, exterior materials, roofs, gutters, down spouts, attic areas, basements, exterior porches and steps, foundations waterproofing and footing drains. Provide detailed repair, replacement and maintenance procedures sufficient to last 5 years, of the following:

- Moisture control;
- Verify integrity of existing roofing components;
- Recommendations for repair, cleaning, replacement of gutter systems and down spouts;
- Verify integrity of building structural components;
- Recommendation of necessary structural bracing (roof, porches, etc);
- Expose and verify integrity of existing footing drain systems;
- Masonry inspection;
- Interior wood mouldings, trim, doors, etc.;
- Recommendation of mould remediation;
- Verify existing security measures are sufficient;
- Recommendation on structural integrity of wood porches and cupolas;
- Verify integrity of existing building foundation waterproofing;
- Design and detail building ventilation system;
- Maintenance recommendations;
- Periodic inspection recommendations;
- Pest control;
- Vegetation control and/or removal; and
- Preparation of cost estimates for the repair, replacement and maintenance of various conservation recommendations

The proposed **schedule of works** for the buildings is to cover, among other things, the following relevant requirements:

- Verify all existing conditions;
- Install intrusion and smoke detectors;
- Install all plywood, framing lumber etc. with galvanised deck screws;
- Open all interior doors and attic access hatches. Secure in open position with wood wedges if necessary;
- Remove all trash and debris from building interior. Broom clean all ceilings, walls and all horizontal surfaces, removing all loose paint. Remove interior window curtains, roller shades etc.;
- Clean all gutters. Repair and cement gutters. Clean all rainwater leaders. Ensure water runs from building in the absence of a working underground collection system;
- Remove all antenna and related wiring;
- Remove all loose paint and repaint all exterior wood trim, doors and frames using agreed paint system;
- Adjust all double hung windows and storm sash;

- Install new wood framed partition and security door at garage doors;
- Clean all areas;
- Install plywood over attic windows;
- Repair roof leaks;
- Remove vines, tree or branches;
- Replace wood fencing;
- Remove items around building; and
- Replace deteriorated items.

Again, the external appearance of the building can have a bearing on public attitudes to it and it is important not to send out the message that the building is abandoned or even vacant. Recording of the building should involve detailed drawing of all mouldings and other joinery work as this may be required for reconstruction should the interior suffers loss through fire, theft or rot.

### **Example: Howden House, Livingston, West Lothian**

The planning authority made it a condition of listed building consent to convert this large house that before works commenced a detailed survey of all internal mouldings was undertaken by the applicants including those in rooms not proposed for change. After works commenced there was a hiatus during which original features removed to storage were lost. The survey drawings allowed the originals to be replicated.

Individual contractors, architects, surveys and estates offices often evolve their own favoured technical details for ensuring security and ventilation when a building is subject to a sustained period of vacancy.

### **Example: East Church, Cromarty, Highland**

The owners, The Scottish Redundant Churches Trust, have employed an effective joinery technique suggested by their architects for keeping the sash and case windows open yet secure and safe from bird entry. This method was adapted from that previously employed in sanatoriums to ensure proper ventilation of the wards.

## 5 Managed Ruins and Structures

There are situations where the listed building has deteriorated considerably, such as having lost its roof, or is of a scale and location that proposals for conversion are highly unlikely to come forward. Similarly, some buildings will never provide any social or economic use but are of special architectural or historic interest or make a valuable contribution to the townscape or landscape that should not be lost. In such situations it may be appropriate to do the minimum to ensure the survival of the structural envelope while removing any danger to the public and threat of loss.

**Example: Midhope, West Lothian**

This tower house is maintained with minimal attention its owners. The roof was renewed, windows boarded and masonry repaired some decades ago but the building continues to stand vacant but not deteriorating.

**Example: Little Mill, West Lothian**

The old mill structure, located in a remote location adjacent to a sewage works, was consolidated through a masonry training scheme and now sits as a picturesque riverside feature enjoyed by the small number of people who visit its location.

**Example: Penicuik House, Midlothian**

This substantial structure is used for masonry training purposes. There is an associated initiative to undertake limited holding maintenance to the landscape structures elsewhere in the estate.

**Example: Ruchill Hospital Water Tower, Glasgow<sup>10</sup>**

This listed landmark no longer has a use but was made structurally sound and highly secure to ensure its survival in a location where vandalism is a constant threat.

**Castle Roy, near Nethy Bridge, Highland<sup>11</sup>**

A corner of this ancient fort collapsed and rabbits and livestock caused considerable damage to the base of the walls. In response, consolidation was undertaken to secure the foundations. It is now intended to remove plant growth from the walls, cap the tops and re-build damaged masonry areas so that the structure can become a visitor attraction.

## 6 Property Guardians

Property guardians are formally contracted 'house sitters' who provide a practical and economical means of keeping an otherwise vacant building secure, monitored and in use. A number of agencies provide specially tailored landlord services to offer tenants basic, unfurnished living facilities such as a bathroom, kitchen, water, heating and electricity along with communal areas such as space shared with other guardians. Guardian tenants are carefully selected and tend to be highly enthusiastic and committed to their responsibilities. This is invariably more cost effective than hiring a caretaker through a security firm. Companies offering to arrange property guardian tenancies can be found via internet search engines.

**Example: The Haining, Selkirk, Scottish Borders**

The owner died leaving the 18<sup>th</sup> century historic building to the local community for the architectural, cultural or historical benefit of the area. Guardians have tenanted the buildings while options for the site are being explored.

<sup>10</sup> See [http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/ref\\_no/2761](http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/ref_no/2761)

<sup>11</sup> See <http://castleroy.org.uk/>

## **Example: Blackburn House, West Lothian**

The Scottish Historic Buildings Trust successfully achieved conversion of this Georgian house from a ruin to form a centre for the creative industries. While a new flagship tenant was being sought property guardians successfully tenanted the buildings.

## 7 Meanwhile Uses

In addition to physical intervention, management and guardianship there are also benefits in ‘meanwhile’ uses that help buy time for the structure. Meanwhile use is the occasional or temporary use of vacant buildings or land for a socially beneficial purpose until such a time that they can be brought once more into commercial use. It uses the ‘pauses’ in the property development processes to make the space over to activities that can contribute to quality of life and better places while a project is being formulated. The concept, which has been employed in a number of European countries and in Australia, was demonstrated in England through the Meanwhile Project.<sup>12</sup> This was delivered from 2009-2010 by the Development Trusts Association (now Locality), in partnership with Meanwhile Space, as part of the wider Advancing Assets for Communities programme supported by the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The philosophy was promoted by government as a means of bringing back vibrancy to town centres, maintaining economic and social value and making best use of existing resources. The programme provided practical and financial support for a wide range of meanwhile approaches to 24 projects in 17 towns as well as technical advice, manuals and common tools. Although many of the projects, tools and networks continue to grow and thrive, the programme no longer provides financial support and direct guidance. The benefits to property owners were identified as:

- Lower costs during vacant periods when utility bills, security and insurance costs and rates will be covered by the occupiers, thus providing direct savings;
- Security and monitoring through active occupation;
- Enhanced prospects of future commercial use by increasing the level of awareness of the property to prospective tenants or owners, particularly when the home of an eye-catching project; and
- Displaying the potential of the property to prospective tenants.

A set of user-friendly standard ‘Meanwhile Use Leases’, drafted to suit a range of different leasing situations, was developed and shared to simplify the process and provide reassurance for landlords. These are not directly applicable to the Scottish context but are still instructive.

Options range from light touch visual interventions to make a building more interesting and attractive, such as by window installations, through to transforming the space into a major public venue. Potential meanwhile uses include everything from visual displays and exhibitions through work and studio space, rehearsal rooms and storage to more public activities such as gallery or event space, ‘pop up’ cinemas, bars, cafes or restaurants, shops, markets and festival locations. A handbook<sup>13</sup> giving guidance on meanwhile uses was published as was a document<sup>14</sup> promoting its benefits to landlords.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.meanwhile.org.uk>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.meanwhile.org.uk/useful-info/manuals/Meanwhile%20Handbook%20vfinal\\_Aii\\_web-wirebind%20with%20cover.pdf](http://www.meanwhile.org.uk/useful-info/manuals/Meanwhile%20Handbook%20vfinal_Aii_web-wirebind%20with%20cover.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://media.meanwhitespace.com/media/downloads/Benefits\\_Landlords.pdf](http://media.meanwhitespace.com/media/downloads/Benefits_Landlords.pdf)

Selection, agreement and management of interim tenancies must be considered carefully and subject to detailed contracts and monitoring. Examples of temporary uses that have had unsatisfactory consequences for building have been reported as:

- A film set where the company altered the site and left it in an unsatisfactory manner;
- The use of vacant interiors for security and anti-terrorism training where internal doors and partitions were damaged in simulation exercises; and
- Entertainment activities where interiors were blacked out in paint, requiring costly reinstatement.

There are rates implications for owners of non-domestic vacant properties. In Scotland a vacant property qualifies for 100 per cent relief for the first 3 months which reduces to 10 per cent relief thereafter. The relief is associated with the property not the ratepayer, which means that the three months relief will be exhausted by the landlord from the start point of the vacancy and any subsequent landlord will be responsible for rates payments after the set period. There are some exemptions which qualify for indefinite 100 per cent relief whilst vacant, including Listed buildings and those subject to a Building Preservation Notice.<sup>15</sup> Some authorities, such as the City of Glasgow, also refer to Scheduled Monuments.

## 8 Demonstration and Proving Uses

Agreed short-term leases or licences to occupy can also be invaluable in helping developers fundraise and prove their concepts for a building. Where communities, councils and funders are slow to recognise the potential of a property or may have misgivings about the use proposed for it they can become convinced after seeing the use operating successfully in the building on a temporary basis. Over time, activity can intensify until the match between building and use seems natural and is accepted.

### **Example: St Andrews in the Square, Glasgow**

During Glasgow City of Culture in the 1991, this redundant church housed occasional concerts that were instrumental in testing and demonstrating the building's proposed use as a centre for the traditional arts. The building has since been successfully converted to this use.

### **Example: St Margaret's Braemar, Aberdeenshire**

Although an earlier scheme did not enjoy early community support, a more recent project has been more favourably received as local attitudes, aspirations and capacity have developed over time. This fine church is now proposed for development as a cultural centre as well as a visitor attraction in its own right.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Young & Co Rating: *Useful Information* accessible at: <http://www.eyco.co.uk/ratingUsefullInfo/index.html>

## 9 Useful References

The following publications may be helpful to those responsible for managing unoccupied, mothballed or under used listed buildings:

English Heritage/Eleanor Michell *Emergency Repairs for Historic Buildings* 1988.

English Heritage/RICS *Insuring Your Historic Building* 1994.

Westminster City Council *Guidance about Architectural Theft*.

Fire Protection Association *Heritage Under Fire, A Guide to the Protection of Historic Buildings* 1995.

Historic Scotland *Lead Theft: Guidance on Protecting Traditional Buildings* 2012.

---

The above guidance was prepared by The Architectural Heritage Fund for Historic Scotland and is published by the Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland as part of the Buildings at Risk Toolkit. <http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/>

The text contains references to legislation and its interpretation that may contain inaccuracies or be out of date. Ensure you take appropriate professional advice before making decisions relating to property. Feedback, relevant case studies and suggested changes are welcomed.

Principal Author: Stuart Eydmann DipTP PhD MRTPI IHBC

This version : April 2014

---