



# Home Owner's Guide To Using & Maintaining Your Home



## INTRODUCTION

Acorn are delighted to have been a part of the improvement of your home.

This guide is intended to be a summary of the things that you should expect from your home and of a few things that you might not expect. But above all, of what you need to do to look after your home.

Your home requires regular maintenance, for instance, like your car. We will explain something about that in the following pages.

It is also possible that your home may have some issues that none of us planned. Whilst Acorn will have carried out the works to your home with the utmost skill and care that we can, it is quite possible, however unlikely, that something may go wrong. The Acorn guarantee safeguards you from defects that we may have built into your home, for a period of six years following our completion, so long as you have taken reasonable care in maintaining your home and have notified us of that defect promptly before other problems have had the chance to develop. We will also explain something about that in the following pages too.



## NEW HOME ISSUES

Any new home, or extension to a home, will go through the same symptoms, which are completely normal and to be expected.

### Drying Out

It is likely that the materials used for your works arrived with, or had added to them by us, hundreds of litres of water, contained in things like mortar, screed, plaster, timber and the like. This will have partially dried during the build process, but the drying out process will continue once you take use of the space and start living in it.

In general, this process will result in cracking of plasterwork and joinery, sometimes with some “nail pops” where fixings move slightly. Some of the cracking may look scary, but it will not be structural and there are no safety implications whatever. It is also possible that the release of moisture will result in higher levels of humidity in your home than will be the case when your home reaches its long-term “steady state” condition. This may temporarily result in condensation on cold surfaces such as windows or surfaces that were not insulated during the works.

Initially, heating should be maintained at lower levels, with the maximum possible amount of natural ventilation, so that drying out does not occur too quickly, as this exacerbates cracking and can cause finishes to crack that wouldn't otherwise, if they had been dried gradually.

### Decoration

As a result of the drying out process, we recommend that wallpapering and other expensive decorating is not carried out for at least a year after completion, so that your home can go through – and respond to – the natural variances of temperature and humidity through a full annual cycle.

### Appliances

If we provided any appliances as part of the works, we will have provided you with the proof of purchase that will allow you to register the products for their relevant warranties or guarantees. Please immediately do this with the manufacturers, so that you are able to call upon them for repairs and service calls.

You must read all manuals that are supplied to you regarding the operation and maintenance of your home and the elements within it.



## **PREDICTABLE MAINTENANCE**

To work at its best for you, your home needs to be cared for. Nothing lasts forever and everything needs some love, at least from time to time. This advice applies whether or not we have been involved with the following aspects of your home.

### **Boilers and gas appliances**

Boilers and gas appliances are complex machines that need regular, certainly annual, servicing. Ensuring that these are performing well is important for both your energy bills and more importantly for the safety of your family.

Gas is serious stuff, so always consult a Gas Safe registered heating engineer for servicing and repairs. Acorn can help. And if you smell gas, call your supplier's emergency number immediately.

Properly installed boilers will also include a boiler filter, which also needs to be checked / cleaned as part of the annual servicing. If your boiler flue runs through your home, then the annual servicing will need to include an inspection of the boiler flue all the way through your home from the boiler to the external flue. This will need access panels of some sort incorporated along the flue route to the outside.

### **Radiators**

The next most obvious part of your heating system are your radiators. They don't need maintenance as such, but do need checking to see that they are performing properly. If they get completely or partially cold, then they may have become full of air, in which case they need to be "bled". This usually is a simple process requiring a key to open a small valve at the top of the radiator to let out any trapped air. Be careful, though, as any water that escapes may be a bit dirty and you wouldn't want to stain carpets or adjacent curtains.

If the water in your radiators is really dirty, then it may be that your heating system has not been filled with the correct chemicals to prevent both corrosion of steel components such as radiators and the build up of gunge in the pipework. If this is the case, then your heating system really needs to be power flushed to clear the gunge and then re-filled with the correct chemicals.

### **Fire Alarms**

Any smoke and heat detectors in your home should be regularly tested by pressing the "Test" button to check that it works. It is recommended that you should test mains powered detectors weekly. And that you occasionally run a vacuum cleaner over the head to make sure that the detector is not clogged up.

### **Windows and glass doors**

More complex windows and especially doors will need regular servicing to keep all the moving parts in good order.

However, the most regular servicing they need will be cleaning them! Glass and the frames should be cleaned with soapy water, well rinsed and dried with a soft cloth. Sliding or folding doors will need the tracks cleaned out regularly to prevent grit from damaging the mechanisms.

## **Timber and laminate floors**

Timber floors are beautiful, but they need careful maintenance. Unless we specifically advise otherwise, they should be cleaned with a damp cloth or mop – never a wet one! Wood and water just don't mix. Sparing use of a steam cleaner is also fine. Spills should be removed immediately.

Timber floors require the use of a polish from time to time, both to maintain their appearance, but also to seal and protect the wood.

## **Kitchen and bathroom furniture, tiling, fittings and worktops**

This is mostly common sense, in that only products specifically sold for the cleaning of the various elements should be used. Always start with a damp cloth and only build up to something stronger, step by step, from there.

Clearly, any painted or coated surface will resist far less punishment than say ceramics or stone, but even so, all materials and surfaces will eventually get damaged by use of the wrong products or excessive use of any product. Never use abrasive products, solvents or cleaning materials, as these are likely to damage the surfaces of any material. Steel wool and other abrasive pads are out of the question!

Stains and spills of coloured liquids should be removed immediately, especially from worktops and painted surfaces, before they can become permanent.

## **Flat roofs and sloping roof gutters**

Roofs collect wind-blown debris, be it leaves or crisp packets. And they do this all year, not just in the Autumn. The outlets in flats roof and the gutters to sloping roofs need to be checked at least once a year to ensure that they are able to drain properly. Outlets and gutters that get blocked will cause floods and damage due to over flows and other unintended discharges of water to places not expected to get quite so wet.

## **External paintwork**

Any external paintwork or timber stain will need to be monitored carefully. In the early years, timber surfaces will be subject to movement that can open up joints and therefore let rainwater into the resultant cracks. This then allows the timber to start to swell and in time decay, with consequent further deterioration of the paintwork. But any external painted surface will need to be checked for cracking and peeling, which will indicate underlying damage to the painted surface.

## **Bath and shower sealant / mastic**

Over time, possibly as part of the initial drying out, sealants may crack or come away from tiles. This is not unusual and it does require immediate attention to remove the failed sealant and replace it, to stop water getting behind baths, showers, basins, etc and causing damage.

## **Patios, drives and decking**

These surfaces need regular maintenance too. Debris builds up over time and in shaded areas, moss, mould and algae can make the surfaces slippery.

Drains and gulleys should be checked regularly for debris blockage, especially in the Autumn / Winter.

Hard surfaces should be cleaned by moderate jet washing or brushing and appropriate use of a fungicide may be useful in shaded areas.

Composite decking may benefit from the same treatment.

Timber decking requires more intensive maintenance, probably requiring the use of specialist cleaners / restorers and annual application of decking oils or other finishes. Brushing is recommended for cleaning decking, as jet washing decking can roughen the surface and make it even harder to maintain.

## **Moving parts**

All moving parts need lubrication at some point. As well as the more obvious things, this obviously includes smaller items that you use every day, such as locks, latches, hinges, handles. Have some WD40 or similar lubricant on hand to spray moving parts from time to time. Be careful to protect adjacent soft finishes and wipe up any runs.



## UNEXPECTED ISSUES

There are some things that happen that nobody can foresee. Some of these may arise from the way in which your home was built or previously altered.

You should be aware of the following in owning your home.

### Electrics

The electrical installations in your home do not generally require maintenance. However, things can go wrong.

You are responsible for making sure that anything that you connect to your system generally appliances you plug in, are safe to use, have the correct fuses, etc. From time to time, an appliance can develop a fault that “trips” the system. In that case, you just need to unplug appliances, re-set the system and plug appliance back in one at a time until you find the culprit And then get it fixed or replaced.

DIY in your home requires care to ensure that you don’t drill into a cable or pipe, so always use a detector before starting.

If in doubt, consult a qualified electrician to carry out work in your home. Acorn can help.

And of course, always keep water away from anything electrical!

### Having work done in your home – or doing it yourself

This involves a lot of common sense to make sure that whatever is planned is thought through having regard to how your home was constructed and signed off by Building Control. Most things installed in your home are there for a good reason.

Clearly, no structural alterations, including cutting floor joists or roof timbers, should be attempted without professional advice.

Consideration of existing pipework and electrical routes is important. If you have “wet” underfloor heating, think about any work being proposed that could involve drilling into the floor. Use detectors before drilling into walls and ceilings.

If in doubt, consult a professional before proceeding. Acorn can help.

We hope that this guide has been useful. For more information, please contact Colin or Paul on 020 8355 5557 or at [info@acornconstruction.co.uk](mailto:info@acornconstruction.co.uk)

