

The Bleasdale Column



In the past I have written about the new duty to manage asbestos, which came in to force in May of this year and I make no apology for raising the issue again. The obfuscation caused by these Regulations are spawning a whole industry of so-called Certified Removal and Replacement Contractors who will batten on to building owners in much the same way as Replacement Window Installers. Old ladies will be frightened into spending their money on quite un-necessary replacement of Artex ceilings, which apart from the cost, will be an extremely disruptive and unpleasant upheaval to one's home life. Farmers will be approached and bullied into having shippon roofs replaced - although some of them will offer a more robust rebuttal to any cowboys, one would hope?

One begins to wonder how we managed without the window replacement industry before the spurious claims of saving money through improved insulation, started to be shouted abroad? The true pay-back cost of the energy saving arising from the installation of double glazing can never be economic to the home-owner and, if one takes into account the energy used in forming the plastics and other materials used, is even more un-economic in environmental terms. Windows got maintained and replaced when fashion so dictated (the Georgians replaced casements with sliding sashes) using the talents of proper tradesman - journeyman joiners and traditional renewable materials, wood, was used. (What happens to all the glass taken out these days when windows are replaced - is it re-cycled? I doubt it; and if not, why not?)

The only advantage I can see from plastic windows is that they don't need painting and as one who hates fiddley painting, I can appreciate this but I don't see them lasting anything like as long as good quality timber ones and the cost/value equation, even if one does have to pay for periodic painting, can hardly be advantageous bearing in mind the outrageous cost of them in the first place. It is noticeable that Planning Applications to replace those installed a few years ago, are now beginning to figure in the lists.

Why do Governments have to be so gullible in the first place, one wonders and why are they so generous in setting up procedures guaranteed to spend vast amounts of their own and other people's money on un-necessary crusades such as this whilst loudly proclaiming their inability to properly fund the Health Service or even our vital Defence Forces?

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Another matter which I have touched upon before and which has raised its head in the Sunday Press, is one flowing from the conversion of redundant farm buildings into residential use.

Occupiers are beginning to realise that the restrictions imposed on the original change of use Planning Permissions, have teeth.

"The conversion must be contained entirely within the footprint (or envelope) of the original building." Something like this is usually the Policy upon which the Planning Authority relies.

This means that subsequent applications for extra bedrooms, utility rooms or even perhaps conservatories, are often refused.

The response from the Council is, not unreasonably, "You knew (or should have known) when you bought the property." One is left wondering if they (the owners) really did?

Their Solicitor will have initiated a Search and that will have confirmed the existence of a Planning Permission but will it have

listed the Conditions? And if it had, will the Solicitor have appraised his clients of such details? I have a worrying feeling that sometimes he may not! In practicable terms, it can all be a bit of a gamble.

Having worked for several planning authorities, and witnessing the low priorities given to dealing with searches - it is quite usual to give this tedious job to the office junior - and also knowing the low esteem of conveyancing in Solicitor's offices: the least exciting work delegated to the most recently recruited Clerk - I have my doubts.

Where does this leave the occupier/purchaser?