



**THE BEDFORD PARK  
SOCIETY**

For the protection of the amenities of the earliest Garden Suburb

# Technical notes

# Introduction to technical notes

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The purpose of these notes is to help anyone involved in works to houses in Bedford Park. The notes look in detail at the features which give these properties their special character and architectural value. The Society's aim is to assist sensitive analysis and decision-making, not to prescribe a single solution. There is often a case for more than one design detail to be appropriate in a particular circumstance.

At first sight, the design and construction of Bedford Park houses appears to follow a consistent pattern. This is misleading; the subtleties of individual properties need to be appreciated if the architectural integrity of the houses is not to be eroded by incorrect repair, replacement or new construction using inappropriate materials and details. Originally there were differences even between houses of the same type.

That said, the design and construction of houses in the Bedford Park conservation area as a whole consists of a specific range of materials, forms and details against which the appropriateness of a repair, replacement or new construction can be evaluated.

Some appreciation of how the houses were designed and built over a period of several years will be helpful in understanding the variations in detail. With few exceptions, the architects involved in the development of Bedford Park were not engaged to supervise the construction of the houses. Edward W Godwin, Richard Norman Shaw and their successors determined overall design intentions and the nature of details; but as there was a number of builders involved over a period of years, the implementation of designs, and (to a large extent) the detailed constructional decisions, were left in the hands of the building contractors.

Consequently, when replacing lost features or constructing new ones, care must be taken to research details from an appropriate example. This log book's notes on your house should be helpful in tracing the architectural history of the building.

The repair and alteration of historic buildings is a delicate and skilled business. Selecting the right details, the correct specification, and the proper method needs considered judgement.

Generalisations are dangerous as each case presents its own issues, problems and challenges. It is important to take professional advice and employ skilled craftsmen before taking action that may

permanently affect the appearance and fabric of a historic building.

The technical notes which follow include highly detailed chapters on different aspects of repair and restoration, the most commonly successful techniques, appropriate detailing and sourcing of materials. These introductory guidelines explain the main issues to be considered.

## Overall principles

While each Bedford Park house has individual characteristics, it must also be looked at in relation to neighbouring buildings, gardens, the whole streetscape and open spaces.

Certain aspects of the design of the houses are crucial to the architectural integrity of Bedford Park, notably chimneys and their pots, brick and tile colour and texture, roof pitch and edge detailing, window shape size and detailing, fence and balustrade design and brick bond, jointing and detailing around openings.

It should be appreciated that while Bedford Park was influenced by the Aesthetic Movement, the constructional detailing of internal joinery and fixed decoration on the estate largely followed the typical pattern of late 19th century houses, albeit with an unusual degree of restraint, resulting in a simpler, less ornate interior than in contemporary urban middle-class houses.

As a result, there is a considerable, if subtle, difference between some houses – even between houses of the same overall design. Some details appear consistently throughout the estate, others vary from house to house, from street to street or between groups of houses. All details are important to the character of the house, and all replacements should be carefully matched to originals.

When replacing components and lost features or constructing new ones, care must be taken to research details from an appropriate example house. If there is no surviving precedent in the house in question, look at adjoining houses, taking care to establish that the "source" building generally shares design details with the house being worked on. It can be safely assumed that houses built together (semis or terraces) will share details, although there may be some external variances such as gables or bays.



## Sources of guidance

Conservation legislation is not there to stop changes: it simply ensures that what is proposed is given careful thought. This consideration and obtaining the various planning consents takes time, but should be seen in the context of the whole history of these houses, reaching back over more than 100 years. Owners who understand the need for this may well achieve a more economic result. (See separate guidance notes on legislation.)

The requirements of building regulations may sometimes seem to conflict with the requirements of conservation legislation, in particular in regard to subdivision of houses into separate tenancies. However, there is substantial knowledge of how original features can be retained and how the effects of any alterations can be mitigated whilst complying with contemporary codes and regulations.

The Society recommends discussing the details with the local authority conservation officer and, ideally, one of the local expert architects, prior to making an application for listed building consent or planning permission, and before placing orders for any work.

In addition, the Society itself can offer help and guidance before the house owner starts spending money.

A very substantial body of relevant knowledge has been gathered on Bedford Park, which the Society wants to make accessible to everyone involved in the maintenance and modernisation of individual houses. In this way intelligent and sympathetic interventions can be made that preserve and enhance rather than damage our shared heritage.

## Replacement, restoration and reversibility

Whether a feature is original or not makes no difference to its status as a component of a listed building. Alterations, including earlier repairs and additions, can be of importance in the cumulative history of a building and there may be a case for retaining them, even if they do not date from the original construction.

Planners and conservationists alike usually encourage the replacement of obviously inappropriate and substandard alterations, but this needs consultation rather than assumption. The choice is between balancing overall architectural, practical and aesthetic gains with loss of historic integrity. If a feature is of no intrinsic value in itself, it may be appropriate to remove it; but this should only be done after recording what has been removed, following consultation with the planning authority conservation officer and obtaining listed building consent.

Elements such as balustrades, door hoods, cornices, window frames, fences and finials may have been

lost in the past. Provided historic evidence exists for accurate replacement, replacing or restoring such an element can improve the appearance and integrity of the house, but speculative replacement without evidence should be avoided.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings recommends that consideration should be given to being able to reverse any alterations in the future without permanent damage to the building should circumstances change but: "reversibility should not be an excuse for work of poor quality, and sometimes there may be advantage in well conceived and executed permanent alteration."

## Repair and replacement materials

In accordance with good conservation practice, original elements should be repaired if possible. If any element is decayed or broken beyond repair, it should be replaced like for like, using similar materials. There are some cases where a change of material (such as the substitution of hardwood for softwood in external joinery or fences) is appropriate for reasons of durability, and where it has no impact on appearance.

When selecting materials for replacement, take account of texture and size as well as colour and other physical properties due to their composition and form of manufacture.

This is particularly relevant in the case of bricks, tiles and coloured glass. Modern supplies are based on metric dimensions and profiles suitable for mass production. This can cause inaccuracies and poor matching unless care is taken in specification and selection.

Wherever possible a pattern sample should be provided for the supplier to work from. This is not an expensive or difficult process. A small amount of effort and marginal cost – particularly if planned at an early stage – will produce high value for money in retaining the character and integrity of the house.

It is recommended that repairs and replacements should be dated discreetly where practicable, and described in house logbooks.

## Construction methods and techniques

In general, the aim should be to match the methods of construction of the original in order to preserve appearance and historical integrity. However, this may not apply where the original has been found to be inadequate, due to inherent weaknesses rather than through neglect or inappropriate maintenance, or has completed its expected life

Nevertheless, new methods and techniques should only be used where proven over a long period and where traditional alternatives cannot be identified.

A balance needs to be struck between benefit to the building in the future against the degree of damage to historic integrity and appearance.

*This note, and the set of technical notes that follow, draw on knowledge about Bedford Park houses amassed by local expert practitioners and members of the Bedford Park Society, as well as accepted good conservation practice in building construction. They have been discussed and agreed with the conservation officers of the boroughs of Hounslow and Ealing. Whilst every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the contents of these technical notes, no responsibility or liability for any loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from action in reliance upon any statement in the technical notes will be accepted by the Bedford Park Society, any of its officers or members, or any contributors to the technical notes.*