

NEW EH GUIDANCE ON METAL THEFT FROM CHURCHES

English Heritage has issued new guidance on metal theft from church buildings in view of the intensification of the problem in some parts of England. The guidance offers greater clarity on when alternative materials might be appropriate and which ones are likely to be considered following theft of roofing materials.

The guidance is in two parts: the first offers advice for congregations on the significance of lead, how to protect it, and how to respond to thefts; the second offers detailed practical information about selecting the material to be used for historic church roofs and making it secure.

The guidance makes it clear that English Heritage will try to balance the ideal - which means like-for-like replacement to maintain the significance of a building - and the pragmatic, which recognises another material might be more likely to secure the continued use of the building and the well-being of its structure and contents.

English Heritage advises that lead should be retained wherever possible for technical, practical and aesthetic reasons and because traditional materials are an important part of the character of historic buildings. When replacement is necessary it is desirable to use lead on a like-for-like basis, with appropriate security measures installed to deter theft. English Heritage strongly supports the installation of security systems where appropriate to protect roofs and will include the expense of these as an eligible cost when assessing applications to the Repair Grants for Places of Worship Scheme.

The revised guidance recognises that there are some circumstances in which like-for-like replacement following a theft is not prudent. In such situations, English Heritage will consider supporting proposals for the replacement of stolen lead with an alternative material after one incidence of theft, if it is persuaded that security measures are unlikely to prevent further attacks and the proposed alternative material is suitable.

If changes are to be made local authorities and denominational bodies will need to be convinced that the harm done to the significance of the building will be outweighed by the good done in ensuring its long-term wind and water-tightness.

To help congregations and local authorities understand the comments English Heritage makes on proposals for a change of material the guidance sets out the questions it would ask, explaining that it will pay particular attention to:

- How visible the roof is from the churchyard and surrounding streets;

- The feasibility of implementing affordable deterrent measures to prevent further thefts and their likely effectiveness;
- The particular significance of the part of the building which has been attacked.

The guidance also sets out the advantages and disadvantages of lead and alternative materials and suggests ways of protecting buildings from thieves when repair work is being undertaken, especially when scaffolding is in place.

The importance of prevention and vigilance is highlighted, along with the need to use a combination of security measures to deter thieves. Many of the options suggested are simple and inexpensive such as keeping wheelie bins secure, preventing easy access to roofs by making sure waste bins are not kept near the building, blocking vehicular access, applying anti-climb paint to drain pipes and roof guttering, and erecting prominent warning signs. Marking techniques that help to trace and identify the thieves and the stolen goods, as well as electrical security systems should also be considered.

The full guidance note is downloadable from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/advice-by-topic/places-of-worship/theft-protection/>

We hope you will find it useful.

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