

JOB REF: SDR

SPECIFIC DEFECTS REPORT

Relating to the damp walls to hallway and kitchen

Terraced Property in London



FOR

Mr A Client

Prepared by:

INDEPENDENT CHARTERED SURVEYORS

Marketing by:

www.1stAssociated.co.uk

0800 298 5424

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INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTION

We have been instructed by Mr A Client to prepare a report relating to the damp walls to hallway and kitchen.

We have carried out a visual inspection of the property.

The weather was overcast, with some snow still on the ground (and more forecast).

The instructions have been carried out under our standard terms and conditions, which are available on our website and have been forwarded to you prior to our confirmation of instruction.



Front elevation



Rear elevation



Blistering paintwork in hallway that has been damp proofed



Close up view shows the plastering is starting to fail, as well as the paintwork

SYNOPSIS

You advised us that you have lived in the property for many years and over the years you have had various works carried out, including a kitchen refurbishment.

In the summer/autumn you retiled and refurbished the hallway and carried out general redecoration.

You recently noticed blistering to the paintwork and general dampness, which although has been present in the past, you advised now appears worse.

You also advised us that dampness may be coming in from the adjoining property.



Original flooring with a small tile



Damp proofing work to the hallway



The completed refurbishment of the hallway

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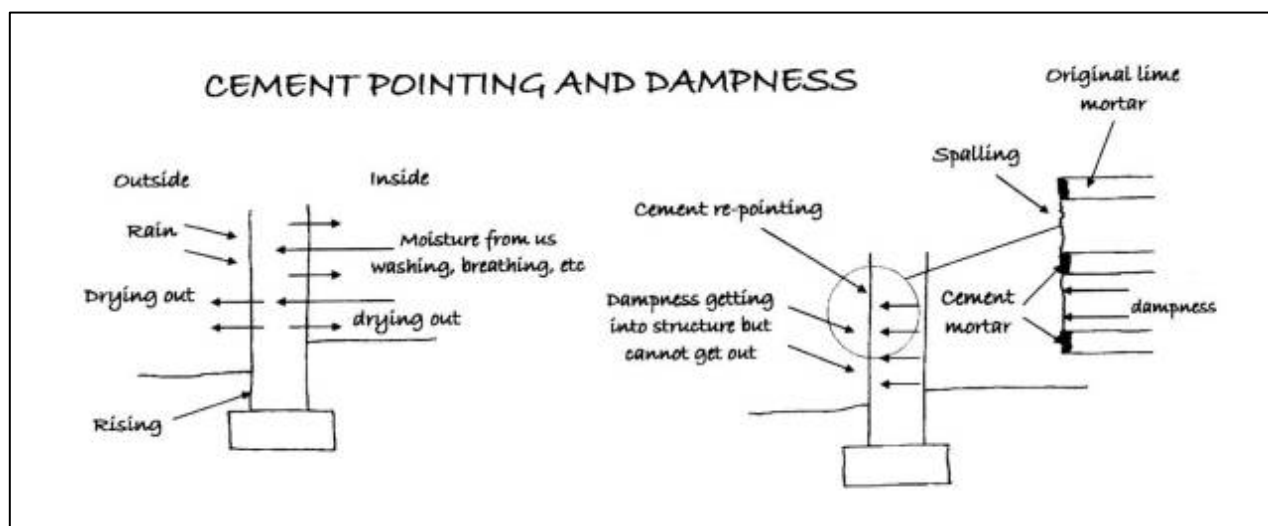
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summaries are always “dangerous” as they try and encapsulate relatively complex problems in a few precise and succinct words. Having said that here is our executive summary and recommendations:

Rising damp

Rising damp is often incorrectly diagnosed in older properties, based on poor knowledge and misinterpretation of visual information and readings from damp meters. The insertion of a chemical damp proof course has become almost the standard answer, particularly amongst the specialist damp proofing companies, who have a vested interest in selling their products, which has become a multi-million pound industry. Unfortunately, this can be a complete waste of time and money for the customer, although initially, it does appear to resolve the problem. However, it often just moves the problem around. Equally as important, it also changes the property from being a “breathing” property; one that dissipates the dampness to the walls, to becoming a sealed property.



This is an example of how an external wall works in an older (post-War years property).

Cause and effect

We are a great believer in cause and effect, in that you have to treat the cause and not the effect. There is no doubt that if the cause is incorrectly diagnosed, and we only resolve the effect, it will reappear, albeit that it can be a long time before it reappears. In this instance the effect you have is the flaking paint and the plasterwork starting to deteriorate and we need to correctly diagnose the cause and take appropriate action.

Is the property excessively damp?

We pose this question because properties of this age generally have an element of dampness (which there should be), which most people can live with. We have carried out a visual inspection and taken meter readings to the hallway and kitchen walls, also within your neighbour's property. We have found that at low level the readings to the wall are two to three times the level that we found at higher areas (the figures of our reports and the two types of different meters that we used are to the rear of this report).



Protimeter damp readings

This indicates to us that there is dampness in the walls in excess of what we would normally expect to come from the ground below. We believe there may be another source or additional sources of the dampness. We feel that whilst adding a damp proof course treats the effect of the dampness it does not treat the cause.

Cause

Visual inspection and meter readings indicate there may be several factors contributing towards the dampness.

Potential causes of excess dampness

There could be several sources of the excessive dampness:

1. Leaking supply pipes and drainage pipes
2. The overflow that was leaking for approximately a year that your neighbour refers to.
3. The lack of ventilation to the suspended timber to both your property and your neighbour's property.

4. The floors and walls are no longer able to dissipate any dampness that gets into them into the atmosphere. They have effectively been waterproofed.

ACTION REQUIRED: We would recommend opening up the floors of the structure to establish what is beneath both yours and the neighbouring property.

Understanding how dampness affects your property

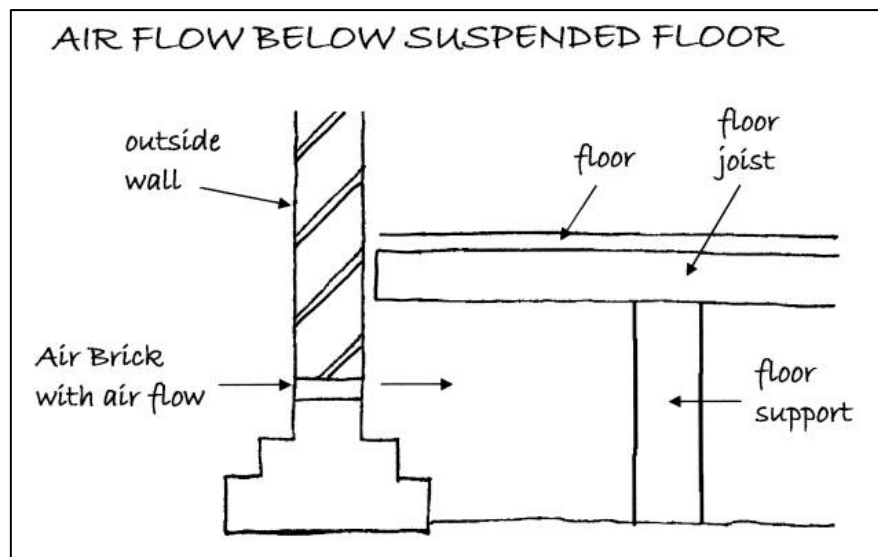
To understand how dampness affects the property we need to understand the construction of properties of this era and how materials work. We have given detailed summary of the whole construction of this property immediately after this section. Here we look at the specific construction in the hallway and the kitchen.

Kitchen and hallway walls and floors construction

Ground floor construction

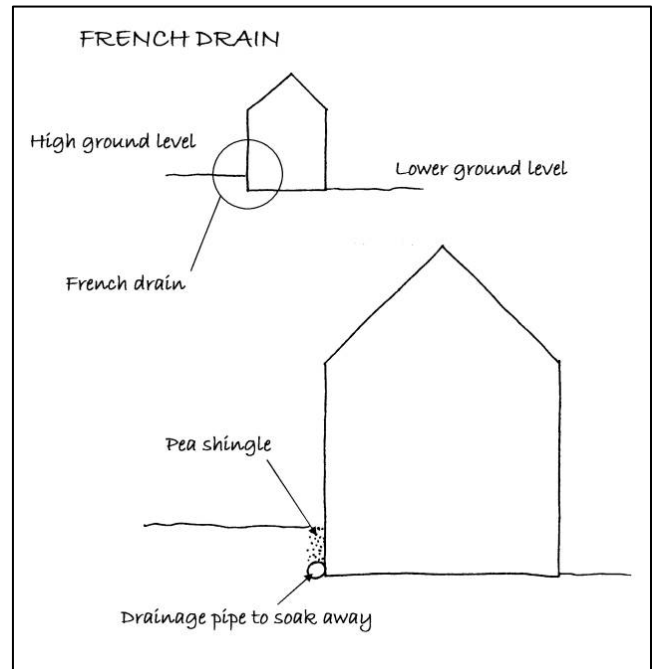
Predominantly suspended timber floor/part concrete construction

The property predominantly has a suspended timber floor construction, with the hallway in concrete. These areas need to have through ventilation to prevent rising damp. Presently, both yours and your neighbour's properties have no, or blocked, air bricks. In addition to this, the ground level of your neighbour's floor appears to be above the internal ground level.



ACTION REQUIRED: Open up all airbricks and lower the ground level below the level of the internal floor with the neighbouring property. Due to the concrete patio, we would also suggest a French drain be added.

In the Appendix you will find information about how to correctly add a French drain to ensure it does not become a French pond!



Air Bricks

Your neighbour's air bricks

Before we leave the subject of airbricks, your neighbour has a good-sized airbrick, but unfortunately its location means it could effectively be acting like a gully for any rainwater or overflowing pipes. This is why we have recommended a French gully/drain.



Your air bricks

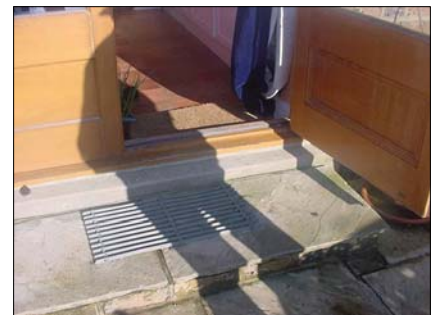
Your metal vent has been replaced with a brick airbrick. As you are aware, this was blocked, as well as giving less ventilation.



ACTION REQUIRED: We would recommend unblocking airbrick and the adding of additional airbricks, or replacement with a larger metal airbrick, as your neighbour has.

Your rear airbrick appears to have been blocked by the rear step.

ACTION REQUIRED: Add additional airbricks.



Ground level

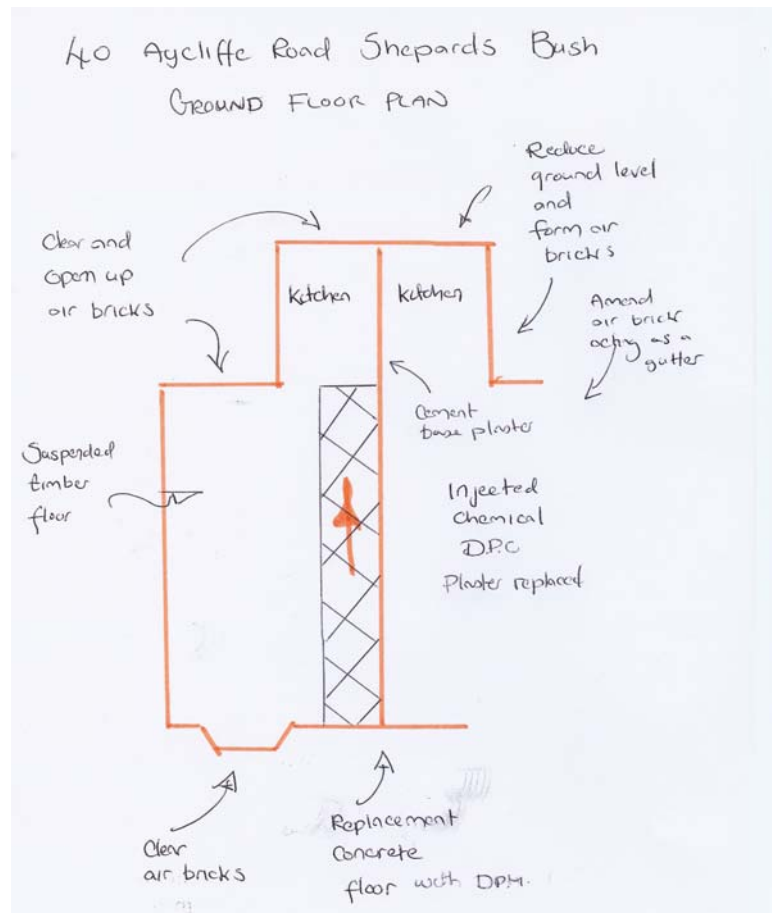
The neighbouring property's ground level is close to, or at the same level, as the internal floor.

ACTION REQUIRED: Lower ground level.

Concrete element of floor

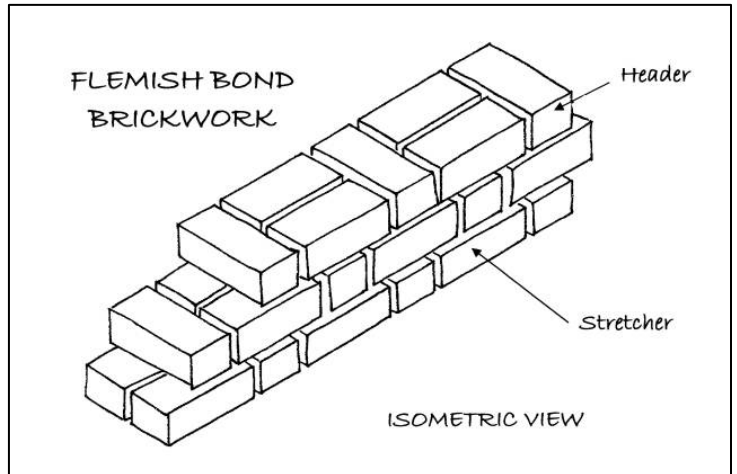
The recent work has involved the replacement of the concrete floor that ran through the property from the front door hallway to the entrance to the kitchen. Please see adjoining sketch.

We believe that the original floor has been constructed with concrete. It also had a tile pattern, both of which were formed with a material, which was likely to have contained lime in it, and could more easily dissipate the dampness. Unfortunately, in this type of construction the concrete floor acts very much like a piece of blotting paper and stores the dampness in a reservoir unless it is well ventilated.



Wall construction

We have not opened up the wall. Unfortunately we have been unable to identify the brick bond construction of the party wall between properties, though it is possibly Flemish bond. Typically, these walls were built with a low quality "internal" common brick.



Finish

The original finish was likely to be a lime based plaster.

Kitchen

From our discussions with yourself and our visual inspection, we can see that in the kitchen the original plaster has been replaced with a cement based render, which has had a skim coat of gypsum plaster.



Hallway

This has a harder renovating style plaster, often cement based, with a waterproof agent applied to it and painted with a modern unbreathable paint.



Your neighbour's property

Flooring

This appears to have a similar floor, predominantly suspended timber floor with a concrete section to the hallway (assumed). If this is original it is likely to be a lime base and therefore be more breathable than a modern cement equivalent.

Walls

Constructed in a similar manner to your own (assumed).

Finish

Unplastered finish in many areas. There has been a modern cement based plaster added in some areas and a skim coat with a water retarding agent in some areas.



Modern hard unbreathable
plaster/render

Conclusion

Mixture of old and new materials

Unfortunately, the mixture of old and new materials that have been used for the work carried out within your property have added to the problems, as they do not allow moisture to dissipate as easily. We would refer to three areas:

1. The concrete floor. It is likely that the original concrete floor had a lower cement content, which means it was able to dissipate dampness more easily. We also noted in the photo there appear to be a higher level of joints in the previous tile pattern to the present tile pattern, meaning any dampness could be dissipated through these.
2. The use of modern materials, such as the cement based render and the plastic based paint, smothers the wall, rather than allow it to "breathe".
3. The dampness that can be seen is probably coming through defected areas in the inserted damp proof course.

Solution

We believe that in this age of property the walls should be allowed to “breathe”, so they can dissipate the dampness rather than smothering them. Unfortunately, the use of the waterproofed and cement based renders have stopped this from happening.

If breathable materials are used, such as lime based renders, without resolving the cause of the problem, it will simply encourage any excessive dampness (for example from the adjoining property) to be drawn into your property.

ACTION REQUIRED TO BOTH PROPETIES:

1. Identify any sources of additional dampness underneath the property.
2. Ensure there is a through flow of air underneath the entire suspended timber floor system. As mentioned, this will involved ensuring all airbricks or grills are functioning properly. This will mean :

Your property

Adding additional airbricks, as the step is blocking the through flow of air.

Adjoining property

Adding a French gully to stop the existing air grill from being used as a gutter and also lowering the ground level.

3. Checks for leaking drains and supply pipes.
4. The use of lime based plasters to all walls, after a period of drying out, following the freeing up of the air vents.
5. Ideally, the concrete floor that you have recently laid, should be removed and replaced. Unfortunately the adding of a damp proof membrane has moved the dampness that you had in the floor to the walls.

CONSTRUCTION SUMMARY

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External

Chimneys: One brick chimney

Main Roof: Pitched and clad with concrete tile

Gutters and Downpipes: Plastic, there may be some cast iron remaining



Chimney to both properties

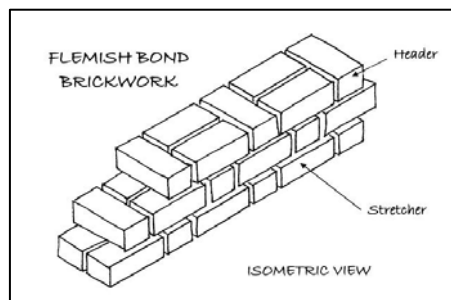
Walls:
Front Elevation: Painted rough cast render and painted brickwork
Rear elevation: Flemish Bond brickwork, partly repointed in cement mortar.



Close up of brickwork, in average condition

External Joinery: Plastic double glazed windows

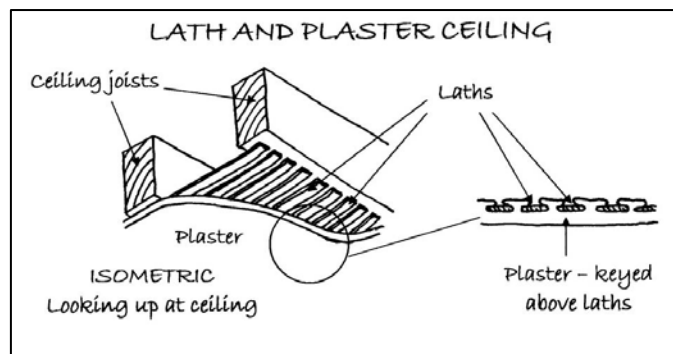
Foundations: Not viewed or exposed, but given the age of the property it is likely to be a stepped brickwork foundation; approximately 300mm to 400 mm in depth



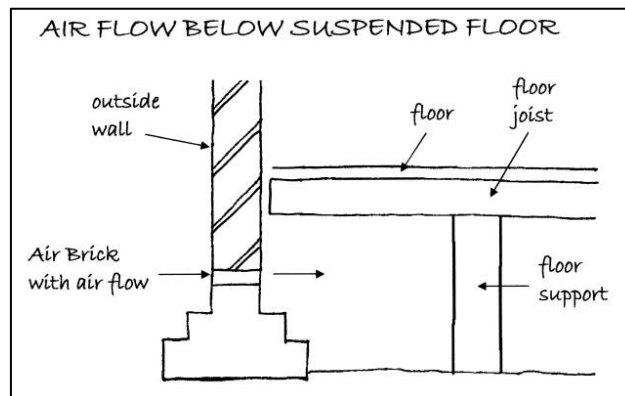
Internal

Ceilings:	A mixture of original lath and plaster and modern cement based render and gypsum plaster (assumed)
Walls	A mixture of solid and studwork (assumed)
Floors: Ground Floor:	Predominantly a suspended timber floor with a concrete section to the hallway (assumed)
First Floor:	Joist and floorboards (assumed)

We have used the term 'assumed' as we have not opened up the structure.



This is the likely construction underneath your kitchen area and lounge.



Time Line – A brief history of the structure

1907	The property was built
1970s	Believe to have been refurbishment and “upgraded”
Approximately 25 years ago	Present owner moved in
1990s	The property was repointed
2001	New concrete tile roof
2006	Refurbishment of kitchen
Aug 2008	Replacement of concrete hallway and adding of damp proof course

INSPECTION

A visual inspection has been carried out to the ground floor hallway and kitchen wall of your property and to the ground floor hallway and kitchen wall of the adjoining property, and the front and rear elevations of your property with meter readings being taken with a Protimeter and a Gann meter.

We also had discussions with the builder, who carried out both the kitchen refurbishment, some two years ago, and also the work to the hallway. He advised that a sand cement had been used with a waterproof agent to the hallway, the concrete being broken out to approximately seven inches, which had been replaced with concrete of four inches and a screed. He was unsure whether a damp proof membrane had been added, but it would appear one has been added from the photos. The damp proof course was inserted to the wall; he is not certain what type of plaster was used. He did advise that when the kitchen refurbishment was carried out a cement based render was used internally with a skim coat of gypsum plaster.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Your property

Visually, there were signs of minor flaking paintwork and plaster to the hallway (believe to be renovating plaster) and deteriorating plaster to the kitchen chimney (cement render with a gypsum skim coat).

We took electronic damp meter readings to the hallway and kitchen:

Hallway

30 - approximately two metres high
35 – approximately one and a half metres high
92 – approximately half a metre high
94 - above the skirting level

Closest to hall/kitchen junction

34 - approximately two metres high
38 – approximately one and a half metres high
66 – approximately half a metre high
78 - above the skirting level

Kitchen

30 - approximately two metres high
69 – approximately one and a half metres high
69 – approximately half a metre high

No floors have been opened up.

Adjoining neighbour

A lime based plaster, visually damp.

No floors have been opened up.

We used a Protimeter, which is commonly used by “specialist” damp proofing companies and also a Gann meter.

SUMMARY UPON REFLECTION

The Summary Upon Reflection is a second summary so to speak, which is carried out when we are doing the second or third draft a few days after the initial survey when we have had time to reflect upon our thoughts on the property. We would add the following in this instance:

Work needs to be carried out in conjunction with the neighbouring property. You would expect an element of dampness in a property of this age, they were not meant to be dry properties. Please follow all our points in the Action Required sections. We would like to be present when the floors are opened up so we can advise further, if at all possible, or digital photos forwarded onto us. We would also recommend decorating in a water based paint. There will be an element of time needed for the property to dry out.

If you would like any further advice on any of the issues discussed or indeed any that have not been discussed! Please do not hesitate to contact us on 0800 298 5424.

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LIMITATIONS

Specific Defects Report

1. Conditions of Engagement

Please note: references to the masculine include, where appropriate, the feminine.

Subject to express agreement to the contrary (which in this particular case has been none) and any agreed amendments/additions (of which in this particular case there have been none), the terms on which the Surveyor will undertake the Specific Defects Report are set out below.

Based upon a visual inspection as defined below the Surveyor will advise the Client by means of a written report as to his opinion of the visible condition and state of repair of the specific problem or problems only. In this instance the damp party wall to the hallway and kitchen.

2. The Inspection

a) Accessibility and Voids

The Surveyor will base this report on a visual inspection and accordingly its scope is limited. It does not include an inspection of those areas, which are covered, unexposed or inaccessible. Our visual inspection will relate to the specific defects shown to us only.

b) Floors

We have not opened up the floor structure. We have only carried out a visual inspection and any conclusions will be based upon our best assumptions. We can open up the floor if so required at an extra fee.

c) Roofs

The Surveyor will not inspect the roofs in this instance.

d) Boundaries, Grounds and Outbuildings

The inspection will not include boundaries, grounds and outbuildings unless specifically stated (none stated).

e) Services

No services inspected.

f) Areas not inspected

The Surveyor will have only inspected those areas identified within the report. His report will be based upon possible or probable defects based upon what he has seen together with his knowledge of that type of structure. If you feel that any further areas need inspection then please advise us immediately.

g) Specific Defects Report

As this is a report upon a Specific Defect we do not offer any comment or guidance upon reactive maintenance and/or planned or routine maintenance items.

h) Whilst we have used reasonable skill and care in preparing this report, it should be appreciated that the Chartered Surveyors cannot offer any guarantee that the property will be free from future defects or that existing defects will not suffer from further deterioration;

3. Deleterious and Hazardous materials

- a) Unless otherwise expressly stated in the Report, the Surveyor will assume that no deleterious or hazardous materials or techniques have been used in the construction of the property. However the Surveyor will advise in the report if in his view there is a likelihood that high alumina cement (HAC) concrete has been used in the construction and that in such cases specific enquiries should be made or tests carried out by a specialist.

4. Contamination

The Surveyor will not comment upon the existence of contamination as this can only be established by appropriate specialists. Where, from his local knowledge or the inspection he considers that contamination might be a problem he should advise as to the importance of obtaining a report from an appropriate specialist.

5. Consents, Approvals and Searches

- a) The Surveyor will assume that the property is not subject to any unusual or especially onerous restrictions or covenants which apply to the structure or affect the reasonable enjoyment of the property.
- b) The Surveyor will assume that all bye-laws, Building Regulations and other consents required have been obtained. In the case of new buildings and alterations and extensions, which require statutory consents or approval the Surveyor will not verify whether, such consents have been obtained. Any enquiries should be made by the Client or his legal advisers.

Drawings and specifications will not be inspected by the Surveyor. It is the Clients responsibility to forward any drawings and specifications that he has or knows the whereabouts of to us to include information in our report. If these are not

forthcoming we will make our best assumptions based upon the information available.

- c) The Surveyor will assume that the property is unaffected by any matters which would be revealed by a Local Search and replies to the usual enquiries or by a Statutory Notice and that neither the property nor its condition its use or intended use is or will be unlawful.

6. Fees and Expenses

The Client will pay the Surveyor the agreed fee for the Report and any expressly agreed disbursements in addition.

7. Restrictions on Disclosures

- a) This report is for the sole use of the Client in connection with the property and is limited to the current brief. No responsibility is accepted by the Chartered Surveyors if used outside these terms.
- b) Should any disputes arise they will be dealt with and settled under English law;
- c) This report does not fall under the Third Parties Rights Act.

8. Safe Working Practices

The Surveyor will follow the guidance given in Surveying Safely issued by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

9. Weather

It was overcast, with snow on the ground, at the time of our visit, which limited our inspection.

APPENDIX 1

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Adding in of a French drain

A French drain is a trench, the width of approximately six inches or 300 millimetres wide, or the width of your spade, and is approximately twice the depth, i.e. 12 inches or 300 millimetres. In most cases this will suffice, however, where there is a great deal of ground water you may wish to make the trench wider and deeper.

A French drain acts as an area where water soaks away quickly. We often recommend them close to building, but not next to the building, as this helps reduce the ground level and/or take any water that is directed at that area away. For example, where a patio has been put in place which aims any rainwater at part of the wall.

