PROPOSED WINDOW ‘SCRAPPAGE’ SCHEME THREATENS HISTORIC BUILDINGS

With the Budget confirmed for March 24, heritage bodies are urging Chancellor Alistair Darling to resist a misconceived incentive campaign promoted by the glass industry that could put thousands of historic windows at risk and place homeowners on the wrong side of the law.

Both SPAB (The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) and the IHBC (Institute of Historic Building Conservation) fear that the Chancellor may be encouraged to introduce a ‘scrappage’ scheme for windows in the forthcoming budget following a web-based petition to No 10 calling for the ‘scrappage’ of windows in the cause of energy efficiency.

If adopted, such a scheme would put thousands of historic, traditional and wooden windows at risk of unnecessary replacement.

In a petition to No 10, the Glass and Glazing Federation calls on the Government to adopt a “National Window Scrappage Scheme” – and leading manufactures are currently running their own linked money-off promotions branded as ‘scrappage’. Their aim is to persuade well-intentioned homeowners that this is the best way to save money. The IHBC is particularly concerned that neither the petition nor advertising make it clear that some customers may break the law if proper permissions are not in place before ‘scrappage’.

SPAB Secretary Philip Venning says: “This terminology is potentially misleading and could persuade homeowners to believe that there is already a Government-backed scheme in place similar to the recent initiatives for cars and boilers. If a real ‘scrappage’ scheme were to be introduced, it could actually have a devastating effect on historic buildings - and also on buildings that are not listed, but which have traditional wooden windows. These can be easily repaired not replaced.”

Recent research by Glasgow Caledonian University has demonstrated that the adoption of a wide range of simpler, less expensive measures - including the introduction of shutters and even fitting heavier curtains - can significantly reduce heat loss through traditional sash windows without the need to replace them. Such windows may be hundreds of years old, yet can still be effectively and economically repaired and upgraded for continued use.

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IHBC Director, Seán O’Reilly, says: ‘The scrappage strategy threatens historic windows and glazing of all periods. Most importantly, it ignores how the scheme could increase the carbon ‘footprint’ of each householder by promoting unnecessary waste, damage to the building and the adoption of unsustainable technologies with limited repair potential and short life cycles.’

‘Traditional traditional timber technology has been especially well studied by the national heritage agencies English Heritage and Historic Scotland. Here simple repair and upgrading, including reinstating traditional technology such as shutters, consistently proved their environmental and economic effectiveness. We all recognise the need to increase energy efficiency, but we need government to reach the right answer, not to push the wrong one.’

Ends

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Notes to Editors

For more information about SPAB, courses, advice and other publications go to www.spab.org.uk

SPAB is Britain’s oldest building conservation body. It was set up by William Morris to oppose the destructive restorations of the Victorian era and promote the alternative of “conservative repair”. By law it must be notified of applications to demolish listed buildings in England and Wales and comments on hundreds each year. Today its broad remit is to advise, educate and campaign. The Society also trains architects and craftsmen; produces a range of helpful publications and campaigns on issues like VAT. It also has a separate section devoted to Mills.

The IHBC is the principal professional body for building conservation practitioners and historic environment specialists working in the UK.