...than
SORRY!

This leaflet is based on the guidance given in Good Building Guides 13 & 14 available from the BRE Bookshop, Building Research Establishment, Garston, Watford WD25 9XX Tel 01923 664262 or online at www.brebookshop.com

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YOUR GARDEN WALLS

Garden and boundary walls should be inspected from time
to time to see if any repairs are
necessary, or whether a wall needs rebuilding.

Such walls are amongst the
most common forms of masonry
to suffer collapse, and they
are unfortunately one of the
commonest causes of deaths by
falling masonry. Your insurances
may not cover you if the wall
has been neglected.

Besides the general deterioration
and ageing of a masonry wall
over the years, walls may be
affected by:

- An increase in wind load or driving rain if
  a nearby building is taken down.
- Falling of nearby mature trees or planting
  of new trees close to the wall.
- Changes leading to greater risk of damage
  from traffic.
- Alterations, such as additions to the wall
  or removal of parts of the wall eg. for a
  new gateway.

Is the surface of the
brickwork crumbling away?
If restricted to a few bricks
this may not be serious but walls can be
weakened by general crumbling across
either face.

Is the mortar pointing in
good condition? If the hard
surface layer can be picked out from
the joint, or if the mortar can easily be
scraped out with, say, a door key, then
this is a good indication that the wall may
need repointing.

Is there a tree near the
wall? As trees mature, there is a risk
of the wall being damaged by the roots,
and from wind-blown branches. Damaged
sections may have to be rebuilt, perhaps
with ‘bridges’ incorporated to carry the wall
over the roots. Removal of large trees can
also lead to problems because the soil
accumulates more moisture and expands.

Is the wall upright? Walls
lean for a variety of causes, due for
example to failure below ground
caused by tree roots, a cracked drain, frost
damage to the foundations or inadequate
foundations. If your wall leans to an extent
that could present a danger eg. more than
30mm (half brick wall), 70mm (single
brick wall) or 100mm (brick and a half wall)
then your wall may exceed the recommended
height, or in circumstances whereby this
guidance is inapplicable eg. walls
incorporating piers, or walls supporting
heavy gates or retaining soil.

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Some climbing plants,
like ivy, can damage
walls if growth is
unchecked. Consider cutting them
back and supporting regrowth clear of
the wall.

Is the top of the wall
firmly attached? Brick cappings
or concrete copings may be loose or
there may be horizontal cracks (frost damage)
in the brickwork a few courses down. Loose or
damaged masonry near the top of the wall
will need to be rebuilt.

Is the mortar pointing in
good condition? If the hard
surface layer can be picked out from
the joint, or if the mortar can easily be
scraped out with, say, a door key, then
this is a good indication that the wall may
need repointing.

Are there any cracks in
the wall? Hairline cracks (0-2mm
across) are common in walls and may
not indicate serious problems. For wider
cracks seek expert advice; some may indicate
a need for partial or complete rebuilding.
Seek advice on any horizontal cracks which
pass right through a wall or any cracks close
to piers or gates. Repointing of cracks can
lead to problems. Do not repoint without
establishing the cause of the cracking.

A part of a wall in
poor condition may
collapse, bringing
down the rest of the
good wall with it.