

Home Experts

HOME HELP

Can't find your stopcock or can't stand your cladding? Our team are on hand



ILLUSTRATION BY BIRCHBY MACQUEEN

PROBLEM OF THE WEEK
BALLS FROM THE LOCAL CRICKET CLUB FLY INTO OUR GARDEN

Q We have lived next to the local cricket club since 1985. During the course of a season, we get about 15 balls in our garden. This summer, one landed a foot from our granddaughter, aged 3. It was a close call. Recently, a groundsman told us there is a legal requirement for the club to provide netting along the perimeter of the field. Is this the case? If so, how should we approach the club, which dismissed netting some years ago for being too expensive?
Wendy and Bruce Ogilvy, via email

A Over the years, the courts have decided a number of cases about how to assess whether a nuisance is caused by sporting activities. In the seminal judgment by

the Court of Appeal in the 1977 case of Miller v Jackson, Lord Denning — making no secret of his love of cricket — made it clear that homeowners living near a ground were not entitled to an injunction preventing the game from being played on the land. The facts were similar to yours. It was decided that the public benefit derived from playing and watching cricket prevailed over the hardship to homeowners.

In Lawrence v Fen Tigers, a 2014 case about a speedway track, the Supreme Court ruled that courts have complete discretion about whether or not to order an injunction, and that public benefit is a factor to be taken into account, along with the degree of nuisance caused.

Although it is generally not a defence for a cricket club to say that the complaining homeowner moved to the area in full knowledge of the risks, if matches

were being played there before your house was even built, it is unlikely that the court would stop the club now.

That said, you could write to it threatening to take the issue to court unless it installs netting. I am not aware of any rule that cricket clubs must have this, but ask your local authority if there is a specific planning condition relating to this club or area. You could offer to contribute to the cost of the netting. It would carry more weight if other

neighbours would join your claim (and the offer to contribute). If the club refused a reasonable offer to negotiate, it would risk having to pay costs in any subsequent court proceedings; this might persuade it to act to minimise the nuisance to you.

Ed Cracknell,
senior associate,
Russell-Cooke Solicitors;
russell-cooke.co.uk



Q My home is being inundated with cluster flies. What can I do?
Joy Dansette, Oxfordshire

A Cluster flies, usually *Pollenia rudis*, are earthworm parasites. They occur wherever there is soil and cluster as winter closes in. As mornings become cooler, they warm themselves on walls and tree trunks in the slanting rays of the sun, readying for flight. As the days get colder, instead of flying they crawl upwards, looking for what they think are tree hollows in which to hibernate. But crawling up walls brings them under the eaves and into lofts. Some are roused by heating and find their way into the main house, buzzing lazily about or dying in droves inside windows.

The only way to stop them may be to add soffits to block entry at the eaves, but this can interfere with ventilation. So check the attic and vacuum up the dead bodies every day. The good news? They aren't attracted to food and do not spread diseases.

Richard Jones, author of House Guests, House Pests (Bloomsbury £9.99);
bugmanjones.com

Q Our 1970s house is clad with green tiles, which look dated. Is it possible to paint them, rather than replace the lot? They are concrete, topped by a sand layer (green). If not, what is a good low-maintenance replacement cladding?
Helen Storey, Kent

A Painting may seem like a quick, low-cost solution, but it's difficult — hung tiles overlap half a tile across the one below, so you must paint behind them or the original colour will remain visible. It won't look attractive, either, and is unlikely to last.

The best long-term solution is to replace the tiles with new cladding. This will also allow you to add external insulation, improving energy efficiency. A builder will be able to advise on the best way to do this.

The sand-faced green-grey concrete tiles you describe are often found in Cornwall and the southwest: an attractive replacement, widely used in the area, is local slate. Alternatively, handmade clay tiles in orange, red and brown terracotta shades will give a warm, traditional look.

If you don't want tiles again, you could opt for horizontal timber cladding, painted,

stained or left to weather naturally. A more resilient, low-maintenance alternative is cement weatherboarding, designed to look like timber and available in a range of colours.

Smooth or textured render are also options, applied over a board fixed to the battens, with reinforcement mesh to prevent cracking. If you opt for a render finish, there are systems that can be applied directly to external insulation. Modern renders are reinforced with

polymers to reduce the risk of cracking and are self-coloured, so they do not require painting. This makes them an ideal low-maintenance option.

Prices range from about £40 a sq metre for render to £80-£100 a sq metre for slate.

Michael Holmes, property expert for the Homebuilding & Renovating Show. Claim two free tickets for the Somerset show (November 17 and 18) at homebuildingshow.co.uk/STSW

TOP TIPS
CLEANING WINDOWS

This may seem like a spring activity, but in Scandinavia they do the windows every time the clocks change. Here are GHI's tips:

● First, take down net curtains and blinds, then clear windows and sills.

● Wipe mildew from frames with an old cloth dipped in a branded fungicide or a solution of bleach.

● Use a branded window cleaner or mix your own (one part white vinegar to

nine parts water). Use a lint-free cloth or chamois leather. The GHI also rates the e-cloth Window Pack (£9.50; amazon.co.uk).

● Buff the window dry using a clean cloth — it's better than scrunched-up newspaper. If you have large areas of glass to clean (conservatory, patio doors), try a window vacuum. Our top scorer is the Kärcher WV5 Premium (£80; johnlewis.com).

goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute



Q We live in a Victorian terrace that has been converted into two flats, and we can't find our stopcock. When we bought, the pack said it was under the kitchen sink, but this is just an isolator tap. How can we find it? Thames Water is unable to help.
Ruth O, London

A This is a surprisingly common problem, and a serious one: if you can't

find it, you won't be able to stop mains water from flooding your house if you have a burst pipe. The first thing to do is to see whether the previous owners can help. If not, ask the people in the other flat where theirs is, or if neighbouring houses have the same conversion, try them.

There may be plans for the flats with these details. Try the local planning department. If you're on a water meter, there should be a stopcock either

side of this. If it's outside, it may be the only stop tap.

The water will come into the building at ground level. Run a cold tap in the kitchen and walk around, listening out for water flowing in the pipes. The stopcock should be close to the entry point. Take off the kick panels under the kitchen cupboards: sometimes you'll find the inlet pipe there.

If you're on the first floor, the water will obviously come up from below. If you can find the pipe, get a plumber to fit a new stopcock on it. Otherwise, look in every nook and cranny: meter cupboards, the airing cupboard (behind the hot cylinder), under the stairs, under loose floorboards or skirting boards, boxed in behind kitchen cupboard back panels, under the bath or behind the loo, and behind the washing machine, cooker or fridge.

Joe Greaves, owner, Paveway Plumbing, Leicester; pavewayplumbing.co.uk

DO YOU NEED HELP FROM ONE OF OUR EXPERTS?

Email your questions to **homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk**. Advice is given without responsibility

Places, People and Property with Strutt & Parker

As the nights draw in and temperatures drop, there's nothing more tempting than curling up in front of a crackling fire and escaping from the world. Creating an inviting living space this winter is a must for sellers, keeping buyers feeling warm and cosy on viewings.

Inglenook fireplaces are a popular feature of period homes, acting as a natural focal point in a room. The time-honoured tradition of an open fire will be further well received if the décor matches, go for neutral colours, ambient lighting and textured throws. While the nostalgia of stacking up the dog grate with logs to create a blazing fire is an alluring one, do be mindful of ventilation and maintenance.

A wood burning stove can offer a more practical and efficient approach to a winter fire. The cast iron heater is eco-friendly, less expensive than oil and gas, and can give a room an instant style upgrade, thanks to chic Scandinavian designs. Top of the range models can last a lifetime and can be the perfect stand-alone room heat source.

If you're thinking of opening up a disused fireplace, get the flue checked and ask an expert for bespoke advice on your options for installing a stove. If you're concerned about indoor air quality from fires, an air quality monitor will help ensure you stay both safe and warm.

Do not forget the merits of underfloor heating, it can be an efficient way of heating a whole room, controlled remotely through a smart meter. Enjoying the luxury of warm floors on cold winter mornings can also be eco-friendly. Experts suggest a potential 40% saving on energy bills when heating is linked to a renewable energy source, such as solar heating or a ground source heat pump.

This week, we feature some of our favourite properties currently for sale with beautiful fireplaces, from Italian stone surrounds, to inglenook fireplaces. To view more properties for sale, visit struttandparker.com/times

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STRUTT & PARKER

THIS WEEK

The Great Indoors

For more properties visit our website struttandparker.com

Itchenor, West Sussex, Guide Price £3,950,000, Country Department 020 8712 8591



Offers over £950,000

ELGIN, MORAYSHIRE

A magnificent period house with an inset open fire. Located in the heart of Morayshire. EPC: F
Inverness office 01463 898581



Guide price £1,300,000

ABINGER HAMMER, SURREY

A pretty house with an open fireplace. Located in a quiet private estate in the Surrey Hills. EPC: E
Guildford office 01483 604592



Guide price £850,000

LUPPITT, DEVON

A well-presented property with exposed beams and contemporary fireplaces. EPC: D
Exeter office 01392 249817



Guide price £2,500,000

ASCOT, BERKSHIRE

A stunning home with over 5,300 sq ft of flexible accommodation and a modern fireplace. EPC: B
Sunningdale office 01344 987884



Guide price £3,250,000

SNOWHILL, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

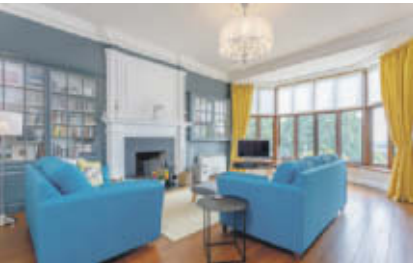
A magical Grade II* Listed Cotswold house with wonderful views and inglenook fireplaces.
Country Department 020 8712 8591



Offers in excess of £4,000,000

DUNTISBOURNE LEER, GLOUCS

An unspoilt Grade II* Listed house with an open fireplace. Perfectly situated in its own land.
Cirencester office 01285 897489



Guide price £400,000

YATTENDON, BERKSHIRE

A superb apartment with a grand fireplace. Situated in a former country house. EPC: D
Pangbourne office 0118 391 3550



Guide price £1,450,000

ST ALBANS, HERTFORDSHIRE

A modern property with focal brick fireplace, timber mantel and wood-burning stove. EPC: D
St Albans office 01727 236396