

Should you choose woodgrain uPVC or real timber windows?

For most houses in England, woodgrain uPVC, a plastic frame finished to look like wood, is the lower-upkeep choice, and it has to meet the same energy standard as timber. Real timber is the better choice when the council expects it, when original details matter to you, or when you'd rather repaint and repair than replace.

From the street the two can look alike. The differences show up close and over the years. This guide works whoever makes your windows, including us.

In short: decide in this order

1. **Council first.** Is your home listed, a flat, or somewhere the council has removed the right to change windows? Ask before anything else.
2. **Look up close.** See both side by side, at full size.
3. **Budget.** Timber usually costs more.

[Jump to the questions to ask before you choose](#)

What is woodgrain uPVC, and how close does it get to timber?

Woodgrain uPVC is a plastic window frame with a printed, textured foil bonded to its surface, so it looks like painted or stained wood. How close it gets to timber depends more on the window's design than on the foil.

In our range, woodgrain uPVC comes in three kinds.

Standard casements with a foil finish. A casement is a window that opens on hinges. These are ordinary uPVC windows in a wood-look finish, not designed to copy timber. Their sashes, the opening parts, usually have a chamfered (angled) or ovolo (rounded) edge.



Figure A. A standard uPVC casement in a grey foil finish. This one has the flush-sash option, where the opening parts sit level with the frame. Standard sashes have an ovolo (rounded) or chamfered (angled) edge.

Timber-replica casements. These copy the sizes and details of traditional timber casements closely.



Figure B. Residence 9 windows, outside and in.

uPVC sash windows. A sash window slides up and down. Ours can match timber sizes, but they run on springs inside the frame, not on cords and weights.



Figure C. Foiled uPVC sash windows with run-through horns. Left: a sash with mechanical joints, its corners fixed like timber joints rather than welded. Right: a standard welded sash.

Cords and weights are the traditional way a sash works: a cord runs over a pulley to a hidden weight inside the frame. Our timber sashes usually do, and springs are available too.

Glazing bars are the thin bars that divide the glass into smaller panes. On our uPVC and timber windows, they're almost always stuck to both sides of the glass, with a matching spacer bar inside the double-glazed unit. That way they read as one bar from outside. On uPVC, bars inside the unit are possible, but people rarely choose them.

Timber has one more option: structural glazing bars, real bars that hold separate panes of glass. We usually fit those on listed buildings.

Is a timber window warmer than a uPVC one?

Not as a rule. In England, a replacement window in either material has to meet the same energy standard, and timber no longer gets an easier one.

The standard is a U-value, a measure of how much heat escapes, of 1.4 W/m²K or lower. The other route is a Window Energy Rating, an energy label for the whole window, of Band B or better. There's more on [what a window's U-value means](#) in our guide.

Timber's easier standard ended on 14 June 2023. So choose timber for its look, its feel and its character, not for warmth.

One exception applies to both materials. A listed building is one on the national list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. The council designates conservation areas for the same kind of interest.

A listed building, or a building in a conservation area, doesn't have to meet the standard in full where that would unacceptably alter its character or appearance. The work should still come as close as is practical. If that's your home, ask your council's building control team, which checks building work.

Choose timber for its look, its feel and its character, not for warmth.

What upkeep does each need, and can it be repaired?

Painted timber needs repainting every few years, but it can usually be repaired. Woodgrain uPVC doesn't need painting, but damage to its finish is hard to fix.

How often timber needs painting depends on where the house is and how exposed the window is. PCW's own maintenance guidance says every 2 to 3 years. Historic England, which advises on historic buildings in England, gives a 5 to 8-year cycle for redecorating painted timber in its guidance on traditional windows.

In practice, not all our customers repaint that often, and we see our timber windows still looking like new after 5 to 10 years. Ask whoever makes your windows what their finish needs.

Timber has one big advantage here: a damaged section can be renewed, so the window keeps going. Historic England says traditional windows "can often be simply and economically repaired". A joiner cuts out the damaged wood and splices in new timber shaped to match.

PCW doesn't do general window repairs. For a repair, look for a joiner or a window restorer.

For woodgrain uPVC, damage to the foil is hard to fix. Ask the supplier how it's repaired, and by whom, before you order.

Whatever the material, grease the moving parts once a year. Our [maintenance guide for windows and doors](#) covers the rest.

Painted timber	Woodgrain uPVC
 Repaint every few years Every 2 to 3 years: PCW guidance Every 5 to 8 years: Historic England	 Clean it, no painting The foil finish needs no paint
 Damage can be repaired A joiner can renew a damaged section	 Foil damage is hard to fix Ask how it is repaired, and by whom
 Grease the moving parts Once a year	 Grease the moving parts Once a year

Figure D. Upkeep at a glance.

Will the council accept uPVC on your home?

On most houses, usually yes, as long as the new windows look similar to the old ones. A listed building, an Article 4 area or a flat is different: there the council looks closely at the material, the frame and the glazing bars, so ask before you order.

An Article 4 area is one where the council has removed the right to change windows without permission. Being in a conservation area doesn't remove that right from a house by itself. Being in an Article 4 area does.

Historic England's guidance says plastic windows are "highly likely" to be unsuitable for older buildings, "particularly those that are listed or in conservation areas". Your council makes the decision, not Historic England.

On a listed building, replacing windows usually needs listed building consent, the council's permission for work on a listed building, whatever the material.

For flats, Lambeth Council, for example, says a like-for-like replacement needs no planning permission, but a change in design, opening method, materials or the shape of the frame normally does.

Our guide on [whether you need planning permission to replace your windows](#) explains the rules in full.

Ask the council before you order, not after.

	Woodgrain uPVC	Real timber
From the street	Can pass for timber	Timber
Up close	Printed grain; replica designs come closest	Timber look and feel
Sash windows	Ours run on springs	Ours usually run on cords and weights; springs available
Glazing bars	Usually stuck on both sides	Stuck on, or structural on listed buildings
Energy standard (England)	1.4 W/m ² K or Band B	The same
Upkeep	Cleaning; no painting	Repainting every few years
Repair	Hard to fix	A joiner can splice in new timber
The council	May say no on listed buildings, in Article 4 areas or in flats	Still needs consent on a listed building

Which should you choose?

Start with what the council requires. Then look at both side by side, up close, on a house like yours. Then be honest about the upkeep you'll actually do. If the council doesn't require timber and the foil looks right to you up close, woodgrain uPVC is the simpler choice.

In our experience, people replace their windows once in a lifetime, sometimes twice. So this is a choice you'll live with for 20 to 30 years.

The common mistake is choosing from a photo. The difference shows within a few metres: the grain, the frame and the glazing bars.

Budget matters too. Timber usually costs more, and if it doesn't fit, a timber-replica uPVC window is a fair choice, as long as the council is happy with it.

A third option is aluminium-clad timber, such as VELFAC windows: timber inside, with an aluminium skin outside.

What PCW makes

Perfect Crystal Windows makes and fits windows in uPVC, timber and aluminium.

Our woodgrain uPVC comes as standard Deceuninck casements, Residence 7 and Residence 9 timber-replica casements, and sash windows made for us by a specialist uPVC sash maker.

Our own joinery makes timber windows to match the original details. That means glazing bars, mouldings (the shaped edges), horns (short extensions at the bottom corners of a top sash) and sash proportions. We regularly work on listed buildings and homes in conservation areas, fitting timber windows. On a listed building, our joinery in Luton can adjust the design to suit it.

What we don't do: general repairs, and we can't promise what a council will decide.

Before you choose: questions to ask any window company

Work down the list in this order. An answer near the top can change the ones below it.

- Has the council said anything about windows on my street or in my building?
- Can I see both materials side by side, at full size?
- How wide is the frame from the front, compared with my windows now?
- Are the glazing bars stuck on, or structural, holding separate panes?
- For a sash window, does it run on springs or on cords and weights?
- What upkeep does the finish need, and how often?
- If the foil or the paint is damaged, how is it repaired, and by whom?

Perfect Crystal Windows has been manufacturing and installing for 25 years, with showrooms in London and Luton where you can see the windows before you order. If

you're weighing up the two, [send PCW the basic requirements](#) and we'll explain the practical trade-offs before you decide.

Where these rules and findings come from

All of these apply in England.

- **Energy standard:** Approved Document L, Volume 1, 2021 edition incorporating 2023 amendments, in force since 15 June 2022, Table 4.2 and its footnote 9: the timber allowance ended on 14 June 2023. A 2026 edition was published on 24 March 2026 and takes effect on 24 March 2027, with the replacement-window standard unchanged (Table 3.2).
- **Listed buildings and conservation areas:** The Building Regulations 2010, regulation 21(3)(a), as amended. Approved Document L, Volume 1 (2021), paragraphs 0.8 to 0.12.
- **Planning:** Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, article 4 and Schedule 2, Part 1, Class A, paragraph A.3(a). Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, sections 1, 7 and 69.
- **Flats:** Lambeth Council, *Replacing the windows in a flat* (undated; checked 14 October 2026).
- **Repair, repainting and historic buildings:** Historic England, *Traditional Windows: their care, repair and upgrading* (February 2017).
- **Upkeep:** Perfect Crystal Windows, *Product maintenance tips and instructions* (updated 13 August 2026).