



**Department for
Communities and
Local Government**

The Chief Executive
Unitary, Metropolitan, District and
London Borough Councils in England and
County and County Borough Councils in Wales
The Town Clerk, City of London
The Clerk, Council of the Isles of Scilly
The Sub-Treasurer, Inner Temple
The Under Treasurer, Middle Temple

The Head of Building Control
Unity, Metropolitan, District and
London Borough Councils in England and
County and County Borough Councils in Wales
City of London
Council of the Isles of Scilly

Approved Inspectors

The Chief Fire Officer
Fire and Rescue Authorities in England and Wales

The Chief Education Officer
Local Educational Authorities in England and Wales

cc. The Chief Executive:
County Councils in England
National Park Authorities in England and Wales

13 May 2013

Dear Sir or Madam

Construction and maintenance of boundary and retaining walls

The purpose of this Circular Letter is to draw your attention to the safe design, construction and maintenance of freestanding boundary and retaining walls. The Department is aware of a recent case where a young child was tragically killed by the collapse of a poorly constructed wall. Whilst incidents involving wall collapse are relatively rare the Department for Communities and Local Government want to take this opportunity to remind people of the best practise guidance on wall maintenance and construction that already exists.

Scope

Building Regulations and Standards
Department for Communities and Local Government
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This Circular Letter applies to freestanding boundary and retaining walls in England.

Current position

The Department has previously considered extending the scope of the Building Regulations to apply to freestanding walls but has decided not to do so at this time. In addition, amending the Regulations in this way would have little or no impact on walls already in place.

Good practice guidance

Guidance is available on wall design, construction and maintenance is available at:

[http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/permission/commonprojects/fenceswallsgates/.](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/permission/commonprojects/fenceswallsgates/)

In addition Annex A to this Circular Letter references a number of other guidance publications that are particularly relevant.

Party Wall Act

In some cases walls between adjoining properties may be subject to the provisions of the Party Wall Act 1996. Reference to guidance on the operation of this Act is also included in Annex A.

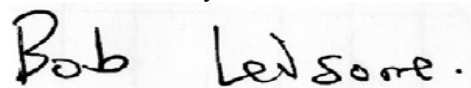
Dangerous structures

Where they consider that a building or structure, or part of it, is in such a state or is used to carry such loads as to be dangerous, local authorities have powers under sections 77 and 78 of the Building Act 1984 to take action to remove danger to the public. The exercise of such action may be appropriate for freestanding boundary and retaining walls that present a danger.

Enquiries

Any enquiries on this circular letter should be addressed to the Building Regulations enquiries box at enquiries.br@communities.gsi.gov.uk .

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Ledsome." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

R J Ledsome

Deputy Director
Building Regulations and Standards Division

Annex A – Good Practice Guidance

BRE Good Building Guide GBG 13 – Surveying brick or blockwork freestanding walls, April 1992, Building Research Establishment, ISBN GG13. Published by IHS-BRE.

BRE Good Building Guide GBG 14 – Building simple plan brick or blockwork freestanding walls, May 1994, Building Research Establishment, ISBN GG14, Published by IHS-BRE.

BRE Good Building Guide GBG 19 – Building reinforced, diaphragm and wide plan freestanding walls, March 1994, Building Research Establishment, ISBN GG19, Published by IHS-BRE.

BRE Good Building Guide GBG 27 – Building brickwork or blockwork retaining walls, November 1996, Building Research Establishment, ISBN 1-86081-105-1, Published by IHS-BRE.

BDA Design of Free Standing Walls (Design Guide 12), February 1984 with August 1995 updating insert, Brick Development Association, ISBN CI/SfB(21)F, Published by The Brick Development Association and available as download:

<http://www.brick.org.uk/2011/03/design-of-free-standing-walls/>

The Party Wall etc. Act 1996: Explanatory Booklet, Department for Communities and Local Government. Published by DCLG and available as a download:

<https://www.gov.uk/party-wall-etc-act-1996-guidance>