

Geotechnical Investigation Report

Proposed Dual Occupancy Dwelling

24 Saurine Street, Bankstown NSW

Report No. R26138. Rev0

Prepared for:

Pulse Plumbing Solutions

22 May 2026



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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a geotechnical investigation undertaken for the proposed residential development at 24 Saurine Street, Bankstown NSW. The investigation was conducted in accordance with Nepean Geotechnics general terms of engagement.

We've been advised that the development comprises demolition of existing structures and the construction of a two storey duplex dwelling including a basement at the site. Design details and finished floor levels of the proposed basement were not available at the time of reporting. The construction of basement will typically involve excavations up to approximate depth of 2.5 m below the ground surface.

The objective of investigation was to identify subsurface conditions and provide comments on:

- Site classification to AS2870,
- bearing capacity of exposed material,
- excavation conditions and safe batter slopes,
- Presence of groundwater and other geotechnical restriction of the site.

The investigation included a site walkover inspection by an experienced geotechnical engineer, drilling of boreholes and undertaking Dynamic Cone Penetrometer (DCP) testing at the allotment.

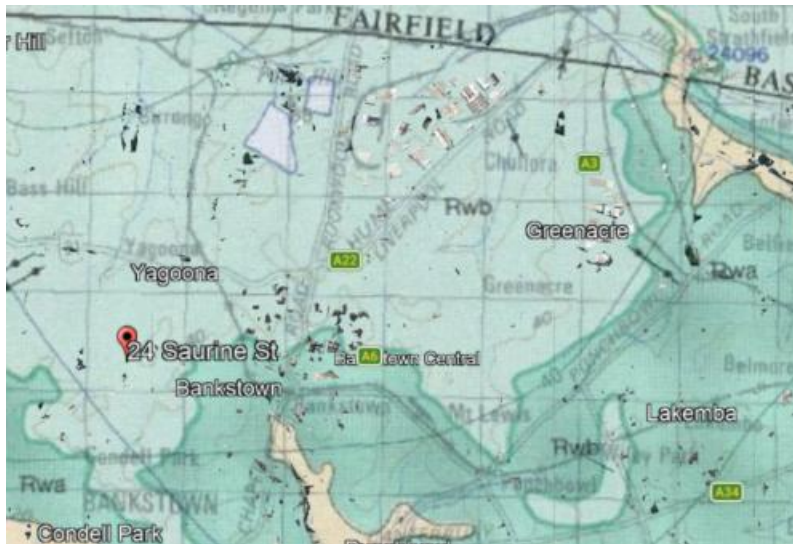
2. Site Description

The allotment has frontage to the roadway along the eastern boundary and is bordered by residential properties to the remaining sides. The site occupies an area of approximately 900 m². At the time of the investigation, the existing structures within the allotment comprised a single storey dwelling along with a carport.

The allotment had a fall in elevation of approximately 1 m to the west.

3. Regional Geology

According to the Sydney 1:100 000 Geological Series Sheet, the site is underlain by Bringelly Shale formation of Wianamatta group. The formation typically consists of claystone, shale and siltstone.



4. Fieldwork

Subsurface investigation involved drilling two boreholes (BH1 and BH2) across the allotment. BH1 at the front was drilled using a Hilux mounted Christie Engineering drilling rig equipped with solid flight augers. Due to restricted vehicular access to the rear, BH2 was drilled using hand portable augers.

Dynamic cone penetrometer (DCP) tests were carried out at the borehole location to provide an indication of the penetration resistance of the near-surface soils. A marked up site plan showing the approximate borehole locations is provided in Appendix A.

5. Subsurface Conditions

Surface material in the borehole locations consisted of minor topsoil to approximate depths of 0.1 m and 0.2 m. Beneath this depth, silty clays of initially firm and becoming stiff in consistency were present and continued to approximate depths of 2.5 m (BH1) and a termination depth of 1.9 m (BH2). Gravelly clays (residual soils) of stiff to very stiff consistency with traces of coarse gravels were encountered below the clays in the borehole and continued to approximate depth of 3.7 m. Extremely weathered rock with seams of decomposed rock were present at this depth and continued to auger refusal at a depth of 4.7 m (BH1).

It is noted that the bedrock at the upper levels may be underlain by seams of gravelly clays or extremely weathered rock before reaching a consistent good quality bedrock.

6. Groundwater Observations

Groundwater seepage was not encountered in the boreholes at the time of field work and shortly after that before backfilling the boreholes. Based on the site observations during the field work, it is inferred that the basement excavations are not anticipated to encounter a groundwater table.

Groundwater observations at the time of investigation are indicative only. Groundwater conditions are expected to fluctuate in response to seasonal conditions, rainfall events, and nearby drainage features. Based on our past experience on similar geological and topographical conditions, minor perched water seepage may be present during or shortly after bulk excavations and could easily be collected by adopting temporary sump and a pump technique.

7. Site Classification

Due to presence of existing structures, the site will be classified Class P in accordance with AS2870 – 2011 '*Residential Slabs & Footings*'. Based on the subsurface material encountered, a characteristic ground surface movement equivalent to 'Class H1 – Highly Reactive' may be adopted for existing subsurface clayey material, provided the footings of proposed development are founded into the residual soils or bedrock.

8. Bearing Capacity

Near surface soft to firm clays or any fill material have a potential for settlement and are not recommended to be considered as foundation material. All footings should be extended into the underlying stiff to very stiff natural clays. High level pad or strip footings founded in stiff natural clays may be designed based on an allowable bearing capacity of 100 kPa. High level footings or shallow piers founded in the gravelly clays of very stiff consistency may be designed using allowable bearing capacity of 150 kPa.

Bored piers founded on the extremely to highly weathered rock may be designed based on an allowable bearing capacity of 700 kPa. Skin friction values of 15 kPa and 50 kPa may be adopted for the portions of the drilled shaft within the stiff clays and weathered shale, respectively.

Footing will need to be inspected prior to the placement of steel and pouring of concrete to ensure the footings are extended into suitable foundation material.

9. Excavation Conditions

Design details and finished floor levels of the proposed basement were not available at the time of reporting. The construction of basement will typically involve excavations up to approximate depth of 2.5 m below the ground surface..

Bulk excavations during the site preparation will be in the clayey soils with seams of extremely to highly weathered rock. The natural soils and extremely weathered bedrock shall be excavated using a medium size excavator equipped with toothed bucket. Some light to medium ripping would be required for the excavation of highly weathered rock seams within the residual clays.

It is crucial to ensure that any possible rock excavations at the site do not have any adverse impact on the adjacent properties. The above recommendations are provided as a guide and the actual ground conditions may vary between the borehole locations.

Site preparation works should generally be carried out in accordance with AS3798-2007 'Guidelines on Earthworks for Commercial and Residential Developments'. Where required, any fill material shall be placed in loose layers not greater than 250 mm in thickness at a moisture content in the range -1% to +3% of the standard optimum moisture content and be compacted to a minimum dry density ratio of 98% standard compaction (or minimum density index of 75% for cohesionless soils as outlined in Table 5.1 of AS3798).

A dilapidation survey of the adjacent properties should be undertaken prior to the field work.

10. Safe Batters and Retaining Walls

Temporary unsupported excavations in clayey materials should be battered to a safe slope to prevent structural damage to adjoining properties. A temporary batter slope of 2(H):1(V) is recommended for cut batters in near-surface soft to firm clays or uncontrolled fill material in dry conditions. This slope may be reduced to 1(H):1(V) for stiff silty clay.

Where space constraints prevent the construction of stable batters, a suitable shoring wall system should be considered and designed prior to excavation to protect the site boundaries and maintain excavation stability.

Where necessary, retaining walls may be designed using the following estimated design parameters:

Table 1: Retaining Wall Design Parameters

Material	Bulk Unit Weight (kN/m ³)	Earth Pressure Coefficient			Elasticity Modulus (MPa)
		At rest (K ₀)	Active (K _a)	Passive (K _p)	
Fill and firm clays	19	0.6	0.4	2.5	5
Stiff Clays	20	0.55	0.3	3.0	10

The above parameters are estimated values and have been adopted from the available literatures.

These values are for horizontal ground surface behind the retaining walls. Granular material shall be placed directly behind the retaining walls. Efficient drainage shall be provided by placing perforated drainage pipes along the bottom of the wall. The effect of water pressure needs to be considered in the design of retaining walls where there is a potential for the saturation of backfill material and residual soil.

Upon completion of the construction, the site should be maintained in accordance with the noted provided in the '*Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner's Guide*', a copy of which is provided in Appendix C. The guide suggests site landscaping and drainage practices to assist in minimising the foundation movements and keeping the cracking within acceptable limits.

11. Impact on Existing Sewer Main

A Sydney Water sewer main exists beneath the site and according to the Dial Before You Dig (DBYD) plan traverses adjacent to the western site boundary. Service Protection Report and the invert levels of the pipe were not available at the time of preparing this report. According to the available DBYD drawings the asset is a 150 mm diameter vitrified clay (VC) pipe.

All footings and piers shall be founded below the zone of influence of the existing sewer pipe. The zone of influence is defined by an imaginary 1H:1V line projected from the invert level of the pipe to the surface. The proposed development shall not impose any adverse impact on the existing sewer asset.

12. General Notes

Our professional services were performed, our findings obtained, and our recommendations prepared in accordance with generally accepted engineering principles and practices. This warranty is in lieu of all other warranties, either expressed or implied.

The geotechnical report was prepared for the use of the owner in the design of the subject project and should be made available to potential contractors for information on factual data only. This report should not be used for contractual purposes as a warranty of interpreted subsurface conditions such as those indicated by the interpretive borehole logs, cross-sections, or discussion of subsurface conditions contained herein.

The analyses, conclusions and recommendations contained in the report are based on site conditions as they presently exist and assume that the boreholes are representative of the subsurface conditions of the site. If, during construction, subsurface conditions are found which are significantly different from those observed in the boreholes or assumed to exist in the excavations, Nepean Geotechnics should be advised immediately to review these conditions and review recommendations where necessary. If there is a substantial lapse of time between the submission of this report and the start of work at the site, or if conditions have changed due to natural causes or construction operations at or adjacent to the site, this report should be reviewed to determine the applicability of the conclusions and recommendations considering the changed conditions and time lapse.

The borehole logs are our opinion of the subsurface conditions revealed by periodic sampling of the ground as the field work progressed. The soil descriptions and interfaces between strata are interpretive and actual changes may be gradual.

The logs and related information depict subsurface conditions only at these specific locations and at the particular time designated on the logs. Soil conditions at other locations may differ from conditions occurring at these borehole locations. Also, the passage of time may result in a change in the soil conditions at these borehole locations.

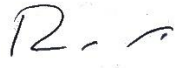
Groundwater levels often vary seasonally. Groundwater levels reported on the borehole logs or in the body of the report are factual data only for the dates shown.

Unanticipated soil conditions are commonly encountered on construction sites and cannot be fully anticipated by merely taking soil samples or boreholes. Such unexpected conditions frequently require that additional expenditures be made to attain a properly constructed project.

Nepean Geotechnics cannot be responsible for any deviation from the intent of this report including, but not restricted to, any changes to the scheduled time of construction, the nature of the project or the specific construction methods or means indicated in this report; nor can our firm be responsible for any construction activity on sites other than the specific site referred to in this report.

We trust the above is sufficient for your requirements. Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned should you require further information or need to discuss any aspect of this report.

Yours sincerely,



Rasoul Machiani (MIEAust/CPEng/NER)
Senior Geotechnical Engineer
For and on behalf of Nepean Geotechnics

Appendix A

Approximate Borehole Locations



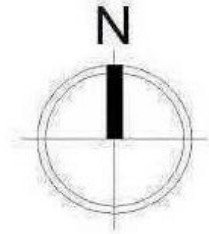
Approximate Borehole Locations 

Proposed Dual Occupancy Development

24 Saurine Street, Bankstown NSW

Project No: R26138

Date: 21 May 2026



 Nepean Geotechnics

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Appendix B

Soil & Rock Descriptions Sheets

Borehole Logs (BH1 and BH2)

Photographs of subsurface material

Soil & Rock Descriptions

The methods of descriptions and classifications used by Nepean Geotechnics in this report are in general accordance with Australian Standard AS1726 - 2017 as detailed in the following tables:

Soil Classification

Grading

Term	Particle Size (mm)
Coarse Grained Soils (more than 50% of material is larger than 0.075mm)	Boulders
	Cobbles
	Gravels
	Sand
Fine Grained Soils (more than 50% of material is smaller than 0.075mm)	Silt
	Clay

Consistency (Cohesive Soils)

Term	Undrained Shear Strength (kPa)	Field Guide to Consistency
Very soft	≤ 12	Exudes between the fingers when squeezed in hand
Soft	>12 ≤25	Can be moulded by light finger pressure
Firm	>25 ≤50	Can be moulded by strong finger pressure
Stiff	>50 ≤100	Can not be moulded by fingers/can be indented by thumb
Very stiff	>100 ≤200	Can be indented by thumb nail
Hard	>200	Can be indented with difficulty by thumb nail

Consistency (Non-Cohesive Soils)

Term	Density Index (%)
Very loose	≤ 15
Loose	>15 ≤35
Medium dense	>35 ≤65
Dense	>65 ≤85
Very dense	>85

Rock Classification

Strength of Rock Material

Term	Letter Symbol	Point Load Index, IS_{50} (MPa)	Field Guide to Strength
Extremely low	EL	≤ 0.03	Easily remoulded by hand to a material with soil properties
Very low	VL	$>0.03 \leq 0.1$	Material crumbles under firm blows with sharp end of pick; can be peeled with knife; pieces up to 3 cm thick can be broken by finger pressure
Low	L	$>0.1 \leq 0.3$	Easily scored with a knife; indentations 1 – 3 mm show in the specimen with firm blows of the pick point; a piece of core 150 mm long may be broken by hand
Medium	M	$>0.3 \leq 1.0$	Readily scored with a knife; a piece of core 150 mm long can be broken by hand with difficulty
High	H	$>1 \leq 3$	A piece of core 150 mm long cannot be broken by hand but can be broken by a pick with a single firm blow; rock rings under hammer
Very high	VH	$>3 \leq 10$	Hand specimen breaks with pick after more than one blow; rock rings under hammer

Rock Material Weathering Classification

Term	Letter Symbol	Field Guide to Strength
Residual soil	RS	Soil developed on extremely weathered rock; the mass structure and substance fabric are no longer evident; there is a large change in volume but the soil has not been significantly transported
Extremely weathered	XW	Rock is weathered to such an extent that has 'soil' properties (i.e. either disintegrated or can be remoulded in water)
Highly weathered	HW	Rock strength usually changed by weathering. The rock may be highly discoloured, usually be ironstaining. Porosity may be increased by leaching, or may be decreased due to deposition of weathering in pores
Slightly weathered	SW	Rock is slightly discoloured but shows little or no change of strength from fresh rock
Fresh rock	FR	Rock shows no sign of decomposition or staining



Borehole Log

Client:		Pulse Plumbing Solutions		Surface Level:		N/A		Job No. :		R26138		
Project:		Proposed Dual Occupancy		South:		Refer to site		Borehole:		BH1		
Location:		24 Saurine Street, Bankstown		Easting:		plan		Date:		21-May-2026		
				Logged/Checked by:		RM		Sheet:		1 of 1		
Method	Groundwater	Sample	DCP	SPT	RL	Depth (m)	Classification Symbol	Material Description	Moisture Content	Consistency/Relative Density	Pocket Penetrometer (kPa)	Origin
Solid Flight Auger			1				SM	Silty SAND dark brown, moist, loose	M	L		Topsoil
			2				CI	Silty CLAY pale brown, dry to moist, firm to stiff	D/M	F/St		Natural
			2									
			3				CI	Silty CLAY pale grey/brown, dry, stiff	D	St		Natural
			3			0.5						
			3									
			3									
			4									
			3									
			5			1.0						
			6				CI	Silty CLAY pale grey/pale brown mottled, dry, stiff to very stiff	D	St		Natural
			8			1.5						
		10			2.0							
		11										
		12										
		Refusal										
						2.5		Gravelly CLAY pale brown/pale grey, dry, stiff to very stiff	D	V-St		Residual
						3.0						
						3.5						
						4.0	XW	ROCK grey/dark grey, extremely weathered rock, with seams of decomposed rock				Extremely Weathered Rock
						4.5						
						5.0		Auger Refusal				
						5.5						

Rig: Ute Mounted Christie Rig

Water Observations: N/A



Subsurface Material - BH1



Borehole Log

Client:		Pulse Plumbing Solutions		Surface Level:		N/A		Job No. :		R26138		
Project:		Proposed Dual Occupancy		South:		Refer to site		Borehole:		BH2		
Location:		24 Saurine Street, Bankstown		Easting:		plan		Date:		21-May-2026		
				Logged/Checked by:		RM		Sheet:		1 of 1		
Method	Groundwater	Sample	DCP	SPT	RL	Depth (m)	Classification Symbol	Material Description	Moisture Content	Consistency/Relative Density	Pocket Penetrometer (kPa)	Origin
Hand Auger			2				SM	Silty SAND	M	L		Topsoil
			4					dark brown, moist, loose, with gravels				
			2				CI	Silty CLAY	D/M	F		Natural
			3					pale brown, dry to moist, firm				
			3			0.5	CI	Silty CLAY	D	F/St		Natural
			3					pale grey/brown, dry, stiff				
			3									
			4			1.0	CI	Silty CLAY	D	St		Natural
			4					pale grey/pale brown mottled, dry, stiff to very stiff				
			5									
			4									
			4			1.5						
			5									
			8									
			8									
			10			2.0		End of Borehole				
			11									
			14									
			Refusal									
						2.5						
						3.0						
						3.5						
						4.0						
						4.5						
						5.0						
						5.5						

Equipment: Hand Auger

Water Observations: N/A



Subsurface Material – BH2

Appendix C

Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance (CSIRO)

Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner's Guide



BTF 18
replaces
Information
Sheet 10/91

Buildings can and often do move. This movement can be up, down, lateral or rotational. The fundamental cause of movement in buildings can usually be related to one or more problems in the foundation soil. It is important for the homeowner to identify the soil type in order to ascertain the measures that should be put in place in order to ensure that problems in the foundation soil can be prevented, thus protecting against building movement.

This Building Technology File is designed to identify causes of soil-related building movement, and to suggest methods of prevention of resultant cracking in buildings.

Soil Types

The types of soils usually present under the topsoil in land zoned for residential buildings can be split into two approximate groups – granular and clay. Quite often, foundation soil is a mixture of both types. The general problems associated with soils having granular content are usually caused by erosion. Clay soils are subject to saturation and swell/shrink problems.

Classifications for a given area can generally be obtained by application to the local authority, but these are sometimes unreliable and if there is doubt, a geotechnical report should be commissioned. As most buildings suffering movement problems are founded on clay soils, there is an emphasis on classification of soils according to the amount of swell and shrinkage they experience with variations of water content. The table below is Table 2.1 from AS 2870, the Residential Slab and Footing Code.

Causes of Movement

Settlement due to construction

There are two types of settlement that occur as a result of construction:

- Immediate settlement occurs when a building is first placed on its foundation soil, as a result of compaction of the soil under the weight of the structure. The cohesive quality of clay soil mitigates against this, but granular (particularly sandy) soil is susceptible.
- Consolidation settlement is a feature of clay soil and may take place because of the expulsion of moisture from the soil or because of the soil's lack of resistance to local compressive or shear stresses. This will usually take place during the first few months after construction, but has been known to take many years in exceptional cases.

These problems are the province of the builder and should be taken into consideration as part of the preparation of the site for construction. Building Technology File 19 (BTF 19) deals with these problems.

Erosion

All soils are prone to erosion, but sandy soil is particularly susceptible to being washed away. Even clay with a sand component of say 10% or more can suffer from erosion.

Saturation

This is particularly a problem in clay soils. Saturation creates a bog-like suspension of the soil that causes it to lose virtually all of its bearing capacity. To a lesser degree, sand is affected by saturation because saturated sand may undergo a reduction in volume – particularly imported sand fill for bedding and blinding layers. However, this usually occurs as immediate settlement and should normally be the province of the builder.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of soil

All clays react to the presence of water by slowly absorbing it, making the soil increase in volume (see table below). The degree of increase varies considerably between different clays, as does the degree of decrease during the subsequent drying out caused by fair weather periods. Because of the low absorption and expulsion rate, this phenomenon will not usually be noticeable unless there are prolonged rainy or dry periods, usually of weeks or months, depending on the land and soil characteristics.

The swelling of soil creates an upward force on the footings of the building, and shrinkage creates subsidence that takes away the support needed by the footing to retain equilibrium.

Shear failure

This phenomenon occurs when the foundation soil does not have sufficient strength to support the weight of the footing. There are two major post-construction causes:

- Significant load increase.
- Reduction of lateral support of the soil under the footing due to erosion or excavation.
- In clay soil, shear failure can be caused by saturation of the soil adjacent to or under the footing.

GENERAL DEFINITIONS OF SITE CLASSES

Class	Foundation
A	Most sand and rock sites with little or no ground movement from moisture changes
S	Slightly reactive clay sites with only slight ground movement from moisture changes
M	Moderately reactive clay or silt sites, which can experience moderate ground movement from moisture changes
H	Highly reactive clay sites, which can experience high ground movement from moisture changes
E	Extremely reactive sites, which can experience extreme ground movement from moisture changes
A to P	Filled sites
P	Sites which include soft soils, such as soft clay or silt or loose sands; landslip; mine subsidence; collapsing soils; soils subject to erosion; reactive sites subject to abnormal moisture conditions or sites which cannot be classified otherwise

Tree root growth

Trees and shrubs that are allowed to grow in the vicinity of footings can cause foundation soil movement in two ways:

- Roots that grow under footings may increase in cross-sectional size, exerting upward pressure on footings.
- Roots in the vicinity of footings will absorb much of the moisture in the foundation soil, causing shrinkage or subsidence.

Unevenness of Movement

The types of ground movement described above usually occur unevenly throughout the building's foundation soil. Settlement due to construction tends to be uneven because of:

- Differing compaction of foundation soil prior to construction.
- Differing moisture content of foundation soil prior to construction.

Movement due to non-construction causes is usually more uneven still. Erosion can undermine a footing that traverses the flow or can create the conditions for shear failure by eroding soil adjacent to a footing that runs in the same direction as the flow.

Saturation of clay foundation soil may occur where subfloor walls create a dam that makes water pond. It can also occur wherever there is a source of water near footings in clay soil. This leads to a severe reduction in the strength of the soil which may create local shear failure.

Seasonal swelling and shrinkage of clay soil affects the perimeter of the building first, then gradually spreads to the interior. The swelling process will usually begin at the uphill extreme of the building, or on the weather side where the land is flat. Swelling gradually reaches the interior soil as absorption continues. Shrinkage usually begins where the sun's heat is greatest.

Effects of Uneven Soil Movement on Structures

Erosion and saturation

Erosion removes the support from under footings, tending to create subsidence of the part of the structure under which it occurs. Brickwork walls will resist the stress created by this removal of support by bridging the gap or cantilevering until the bricks or the mortar bedding fail. Older masonry has little resistance. Evidence of failure varies according to circumstances and symptoms may include:

- Step cracking in the mortar beds in the body of the wall or above/below openings such as doors or windows.
- Vertical cracking in the bricks (usually but not necessarily in line with the vertical beds or perpendes).

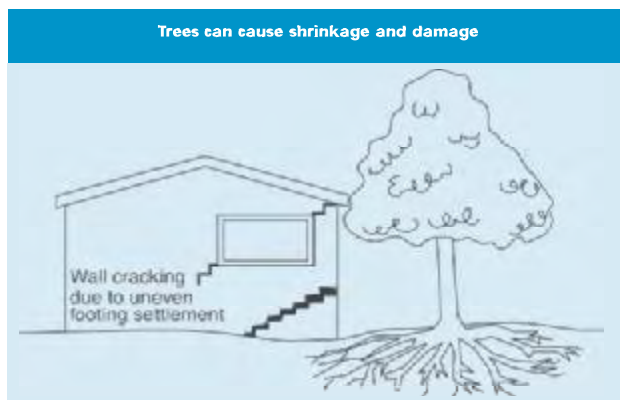
Isolated piers affected by erosion or saturation of foundations will eventually lose contact with the bearers they support and may tilt or fall over. The floors that have lost this support will become bouncy, sometimes rattling ornaments etc.

Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay

Swelling foundation soil due to rainy periods first lifts the most exposed extremities of the footing system, then the remainder of the perimeter footings while gradually permeating inside the building footprint to lift internal footings. This swelling first tends to create a dish effect, because the external footings are pushed higher than the internal ones.

The first noticeable symptom may be that the floor appears slightly dished. This is often accompanied by some doors binding on the floor or the door head, together with some cracking of cornice mitres. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the floor can be bouncy. Externally there may be visible dishing of the hip or ridge lines.

As the moisture absorption process completes its journey to the innermost areas of the building, the internal footings will rise. If the spread of moisture is roughly even, it may be that the symptoms will temporarily disappear, but it is more likely that swelling will be uneven, creating a difference rather than a disappearance in symptoms. In buildings with timber flooring supported by bearers and joists, the isolated piers will rise more easily than the strip footings or piers under walls, creating noticeable doming of flooring.



As the weather pattern changes and the soil begins to dry out, the external footings will be first affected, beginning with the locations where the sun's effect is strongest. This has the effect of lowering the external footings. The doming is accentuated and cracking reduces or disappears where it occurred because of dishing, but other cracks open up. The roof lines may become convex.

Doming and dishing are also affected by weather in other ways. In areas where warm, wet summers and cooler dry winters prevail, water migration tends to be toward the interior and doming will be accentuated, whereas where summers are dry and winters are cold and wet, migration tends to be toward the exterior and the underlying propensity is toward dishing.

Movement caused by tree roots

In general, growing roots will exert an upward pressure on footings, whereas soil subject to drying because of tree or shrub roots will tend to remove support from under footings by inducing shrinkage.

Complications caused by the structure itself

Most forces that the soil causes to be exerted on structures are vertical – i.e. either up or down. However, because these forces are seldom spread evenly around the footings, and because the building resists uneven movement because of its rigidity, forces are exerted from one part of the building to another. The net result of all these forces is usually rotational. This resultant force often complicates the diagnosis because the visible symptoms do not simply reflect the original cause. A common symptom is binding of doors on the vertical member of the frame.

Effects on full masonry structures

Brickwork will resist cracking where it can. It will attempt to span areas that lose support because of subsided foundations or raised points. It is therefore usual to see cracking at weak points, such as openings for windows or doors.

In the event of construction settlement, cracking will usually remain unchanged after the process of settlement has ceased.

With local shear or erosion, cracking will usually continue to develop until the original cause has been remedied, or until the subsidence has completely neutralised the affected portion of footing and the structure has stabilised on other footings that remain effective.

In the case of swell/shrink effects, the brickwork will in some cases return to its original position after completion of a cycle, however it is more likely that the rotational effect will not be exactly reversed, and it is also usual that brickwork will settle in its new position and will resist the forces trying to return it to its original position. This means that in a case where swelling takes place after construction and cracking occurs, the cracking is likely to at least partly remain after the shrink segment of the cycle is complete. Thus, each time the cycle is repeated, the likelihood is that the cracking will become wider until the sections of brickwork become virtually independent.

With repeated cycles, once the cracking is established, if there is no other complication, it is normal for the incidence of cracking to stabilise, as the building has the articulation it needs to cope with the problem. This is by no means always the case, however, and monitoring of cracks in walls and floors should always be treated seriously.

Upheaval caused by growth of tree roots under footings is not a simple vertical shear stress. There is a tendency for the root to also exert lateral forces that attempt to separate sections of brickwork after initial cracking has occurred.

The normal structural arrangement is that the inner leaf of brickwork in the external walls and at least some of the internal walls (depending on the roof type) comprise the load-bearing structure on which any upper floors, ceilings and the roof are supported. In these cases, it is internally visible cracking that should be the main focus of attention, however there are a few examples of dwellings whose external leaf of masonry plays some supporting role, so this should be checked if there is any doubt. In any case, externally visible cracking is important as a guide to stresses on the structure generally, and it should also be remembered that the external walls must be capable of supporting themselves.

Effects on framed structures

Timber or steel framed buildings are less likely to exhibit cracking due to swell/shrink than masonry buildings because of their flexibility. Also, the doming/dishing effects tend to be lower because of the lighter weight of walls. The main risks to framed buildings are encountered because of the isolated pier footings used under walls. Where erosion or saturation cause a footing to fall away, this can double the span which a wall must bridge. This additional stress can create cracking in wall linings, particularly where there is a weak point in the structure caused by a door or window opening. It is, however, unlikely that framed structures will be so stressed as to suffer serious damage without first exhibiting some or all of the above symptoms for a considerable period. The same warning period should apply in the case of upheaval. It should be noted, however, that where framed buildings are supported by strip footings there is only one leaf of brickwork and therefore the externally visible walls are the supporting structure for the building. In this case, the subfloor masonry walls can be expected to behave as full brickwork walls.

Effects on brick veneer structures

Because the load-bearing structure of a brick veneer building is the frame that makes up the interior leaf of the external walls plus perhaps the internal walls, depending on the type of roof, the building can be expected to behave as a framed structure, except that the external masonry will behave in a similar way to the external leaf of a full masonry structure.

Water Service and Drainage

Where a water service pipe, a sewer or stormwater drainage pipe is in the vicinity of a building, a water leak can cause erosion, swelling or saturation of susceptible soil. Even a minuscule leak can be enough to saturate a clay foundation. A leaking tap near a building can have the same effect. In addition, trenches containing pipes can become watercourses even though backfilled, particularly where broken rubble is used as fill. Water that runs along these trenches can be responsible for serious erosion, interstrata seepage into subfloor areas and saturation.

Pipe leakage and trench water flows also encourage tree and shrub roots to the source of water, complicating and exacerbating the problem.

Poor roof plumbing can result in large volumes of rainwater being concentrated in a small area of soil:

- Incorrect falls in roof guttering may result in overflows, as may gutters blocked with leaves etc.

- Corroded guttering or downpipes can spill water to ground.
- Downpipes not positively connected to a proper stormwater collection system will direct a concentration of water to soil that is directly adjacent to footings, sometimes causing large-scale problems such as erosion, saturation and migration of water under the building.

Seriousness of Cracking

In general, most cracking found in masonry walls is a cosmetic nuisance only and can be kept in repair or even ignored. The table below is a reproduction of Table C1 of AS 2870.

AS 2870 also publishes figures relating to cracking in concrete floors, however because wall cracking will usually reach the critical point significantly earlier than cracking in slabs, this table is not reproduced here.

Prevention/Cure

Plumbing

Where building movement is caused by water service, roof plumbing, sewer or stormwater failure, the remedy is to repair the problem. It is prudent, however, to consider also rerouting pipes away from the building where possible, and relocating taps to positions where any leakage will not direct water to the building vicinity. Even where gully traps are present, there is sometimes sufficient spill to create erosion or saturation, particularly in modern installations using smaller diameter PVC fixtures. Indeed, some gully traps are not situated directly under the taps that are installed to charge them, with the result that water from the tap may enter the backfilled trench that houses the sewer piping. If the trench has been poorly backfilled, the water will either pond or flow along the bottom of the trench. As these trenches usually run alongside the footings and can be at a similar depth, it is not hard to see how any water that is thus directed into a trench can easily affect the foundation's ability to support footings or even gain entry to the subfloor area.

Ground drainage

In all soils there is the capacity for water to travel on the surface and below it. Surface water flows can be established by inspection during and after heavy or prolonged rain. If necessary, a grated drain system connected to the stormwater collection system is usually an easy solution.

It is, however, sometimes necessary when attempting to prevent water migration that testing be carried out to establish watertable height and subsoil water flows. This subject is referred to in BTF 19 and may properly be regarded as an area for an expert consultant.

Protection of the building perimeter

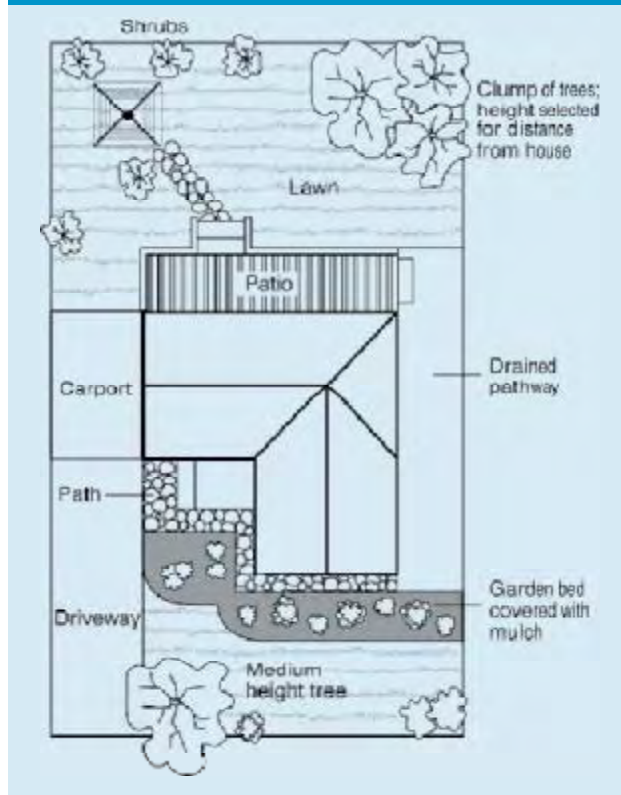
It is essential to remember that the soil that affects footings extends well beyond the actual building line. Watering of garden plants, shrubs and trees causes some of the most serious water problems.

For this reason, particularly where problems exist or are likely to occur, it is recommended that an apron of paving be installed around as much of the building perimeter as necessary. This paving

CLASSIFICATION OF DAMAGE WITH REFERENCE TO WALLS

Description of typical damage and required repair	Approximate crack width limit (see Note 3)	Damage category
Hairline cracks	<0.1 mm	0
Fine cracks which do not need repair	<1 mm	1
Cracks noticeable but easily filled. Doors and windows stick slightly	<5 mm	2
Cracks can be repaired and possibly a small amount of wall will need to be replaced. Doors and windows stick. Service pipes can fracture. Weathertightness often impaired	5–15 mm (or a number of cracks 3 mm or more in one group)	3
Extensive repair work involving breaking-out and replacing sections of walls, especially over doors and windows. Window and door frames distort. Walls lean or bulge noticeably, some loss of bearing in beams. Service pipes disrupted	15–25 mm but also depend on number of cracks	4

Gardens for a reactive site



should extend outwards a minimum of 900 mm (more in highly reactive soil) and should have a minimum fall away from the building of 1:60. The finished paving should be no less than 100 mm below brick vent bases.

It is prudent to relocate drainage pipes away from this paving, if possible, to avoid complications from future leakage. If this is not practical, earthenware pipes should be replaced by PVC and backfilling should be of the same soil type as the surrounding soil and compacted to the same density.

Except in areas where freezing of water is an issue, it is wise to remove taps in the building area and relocate them well away from the building – preferably not uphill from it (see BTF 19).

It may be desirable to install a grated drain at the outside edge of the paving on the uphill side of the building. If subsoil drainage is needed this can be installed under the surface drain.

Condensation

In buildings with a subfloor void such as where bearers and joists support flooring, insufficient ventilation creates ideal conditions for condensation, particularly where there is little clearance between the floor and the ground. Condensation adds to the moisture already present in the subfloor and significantly slows the process of drying out. Installation of an adequate subfloor ventilation system, either natural or mechanical, is desirable.

Warning: Although this Building Technology File deals with cracking in buildings, it should be said that subfloor moisture can result in the development of other problems, notably:

- Water that is transmitted into masonry, metal or timber building elements causes damage and/or decay to those elements.
- High subfloor humidity and moisture content create an ideal environment for various pests, including termites and spiders.
- Where high moisture levels are transmitted to the flooring and walls, an increase in the dust mite count can ensue within the living areas. Dust mites, as well as dampness in general, can be a health hazard to inhabitants, particularly those who are abnormally susceptible to respiratory ailments.

The garden

The ideal vegetation layout is to have lawn or plants that require only light watering immediately adjacent to the drainage or paving edge, then more demanding plants, shrubs and trees spread out in that order.

Overwatering due to misuse of automatic watering systems is a common cause of saturation and water migration under footings. If it is necessary to use these systems, it is important to remove garden beds to a completely safe distance from buildings.

Existing trees

Where a tree is causing a problem of soil drying or there is the existence or threat of upheaval of footings, if the offending roots are subsidiary and their removal will not significantly damage the tree, they should be severed and a concrete or metal barrier placed vertically in the soil to prevent future root growth in the direction of the building. If it is not possible to remove the relevant roots without damage to the tree, an application to remove the tree should be made to the local authority. A prudent plan is to transplant likely offenders before they become a problem.

Information on trees, plants and shrubs

State departments overseeing agriculture can give information regarding root patterns, volume of water needed and safe distance from buildings of most species. Botanic gardens are also sources of information. For information on plant roots and drains, see Building Technology File 17.

Excavation

Excavation around footings must be properly engineered. Soil supporting footings can only be safely excavated at an angle that allows the soil under the footing to remain stable. This angle is called the angle of repose (or friction) and varies significantly between soil types and conditions. Removal of soil within the angle of repose will cause subsidence.

Remediation

Where erosion has occurred that has washed away soil adjacent to footings, soil of the same classification should be introduced and compacted to the same density. Where footings have been undermined, augmentation or other specialist work may be required. Remediation of footings and foundations is generally the realm of a specialist consultant.

Where isolated footings rise and fall because of swell/shrink effect, the homeowner may be tempted to alleviate floor bounce by filling the gap that has appeared between the bearer and the pier with blocking. The danger here is that when the next swell segment of the cycle occurs, the extra blocking will push the floor up into an accentuated dome and may also cause local shear failure in the soil. If it is necessary to use blocking, it should be by a pair of fine wedges and monitoring should be carried out fortnightly.

This BTF was prepared by John Lewer FAIB, MIAMA, Partner, Construction Diagnosis.

The information in this and other issues in the series was derived from various sources and was believed to be correct when published.

The information is advisory. It is provided in good faith and not claimed to be an exhaustive treatment of the relevant subject.

Further professional advice needs to be obtained before taking any action based on the information provided.

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