



# Preliminary Geotechnical Assessment

**Project:** Alterations & Additions  
8 The Crest, Frenchs Forest


**Prepared for:**  
Craig and Nicola McMennamin  
8 The Crest  
Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086

**Ref:** AG 22501  
22 November 2022

## Preliminary Geotechnical Assessment

For Alterations & Additions at

8 The Crest, Frenchs Forest

| Document Status       |                                    |                          | Approved for Issue   |            |
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| 1                     | Cameron Young<br>MAIG BEnvSci Geol | Ben Morgan<br>MAIG RPGeo |  | 22.11.2022 |
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### Limitations

This report has been prepared for Craig and Nicola McMennamin, c/ Hargroves Design Consultants, in accordance with AscentGeo Geotechnical Consulting's ('AscentGeo') Fee Proposal dated 10 November 2022.

The report is provided for the exclusive use of the property owners and their nominated agents for the specific development and purpose as described in the report. This report must not be used for purposes other than those outlined in the report or applied to any other projects.

The information contained within this report is considered accurate at the time of issue with regard to the current conditions on site as identified by AscentGeo and the documentation provided by others.

The report should be read in its entirety and should not be separated from its attachments or supporting notes. It should not have sections removed or included in other documents without the express approval of AscentGeo.

## Overview

### Background

This report presents the findings of a preliminary geotechnical investigation carried out at 8 The Crest, Frenchs Forest (the 'Site'), undertaken by AscentGeo. This assessment has been prepared to accompany an application for DA with Northern Beaches Council.

### Proposed Development

Details of the development are outlined in a series of architectural drawings prepared by Hargroves Design Consultants, DA100-DA115, rev. E, dated 8 November 2022.

The works comprise the following:

- Construction of new balcony extension on two levels at the rear of the existing dwelling, with lightweight panel roof over the lower level
- Construction of new subfloor storage and laundry spaces
- Construction of new landing and retaining wall at southern side of the existing dwelling
- Various soft and hard landscaping detail including courtyard decking and northern walkway remediation

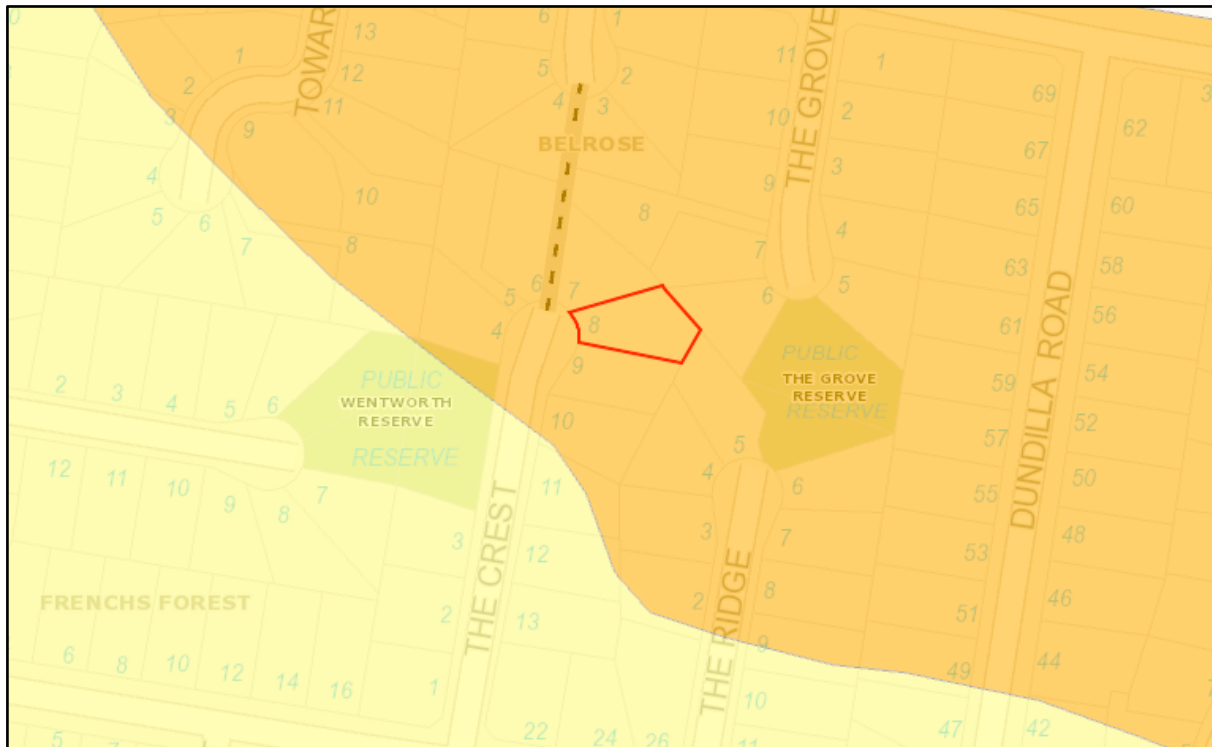
### Relevant Instruments

This geotechnical assessment has been prepared in accordance with the following relevant guidelines and standards:

- Northern Beaches Council – Warringah Local Environment Plan (WLEP) 2011 and Warringah Development Control Plan (WDCP) 2011
- Australian Geomechanics Society's 'Landslide Risk Management Guidelines' (AGS 2007)
- Australian Standard 1726–2017 Geotechnical Site Investigations
- Australian Standard 2870–2011 Residential Slabs and Footings.

### WDCP & WLEP Landslip Risk Class

The site is mapped as **Area B** subject to specific landslip risk/geotechnical hazard mapping with reference to the Warringah (WLEP) Landslip Risk Map, Northern Beaches Council (**Image 1**).



**Image 1.** Warringah Landslip Risk Map:  
8 The Crest, Frenchs Forest (© NBC Maps)

**LEGEND**  
**Warringah Landslip Risk Map**  
Area A - Slope less than 5 degrees  
Area B - Flanking Slopes from 5 to 25 degrees  
Area C - Slopes more than 25 degrees  
Area D - Collaroy Plateau Area Flanking Slopes 5 to 15 degrees  
Area E - Collaroy Plateau Area Slopes more than 15 degrees

## Site Description

### Summary

A summary of site conditions identified at the time of our inspection is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of site conditions

| Parameter                          | Description                                       |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Site Visit                         | Cameron Young, Engineering Geologist –21/11/2022  |
| Address                            | 8 The Crest, Frenchs Forest – Lot 37 in DP 236064 |
| Site Area m <sup>2</sup> (approx.) | 695.6 m <sup>2</sup> (by calc.)                   |

| Parameter                 | Description   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Existing development      | 2 story brick house. Partially suspended pool, supported on stable sandstone bedrock escarpment and concrete piers.   |
| Slope Aspect              | East  |
| Average gradient          | ~20 Degrees   |
| Vegetation                | Small, medium, and large shrubs and trees.  |
| Retaining Structures      | Sandstone stack rock walls in reasonable condition for their age  |
| Neighbouring environment  | Residentially developed to the north-west, north-east, north and south-east.  |
| Geology                   | The Sydney 1:100,000 Geological Sheet 9130 (NSW Dept. Mineral Resources, 1983) indicates that the site is underlain by the Middle Triassic Hawkesbury Sandstones of the Wianamatta Group (Rh). The Hawkesbury rocks outcrops on the subject slope and there are detached sandstone floaters present in the eastern portion of the block.  |
| Geotechnical observations | <p>No evidence of significant settlement, slope instability, jointing or other geotechnical hazards were identified at the time of our assessment.</p> <p>The pool is founded on a series of concrete piers, and a sandstone escarpment. Some of the piers exhibited signs of significant concrete cancer. We would suggest that a remedial builder, or structural engineer be engaged to inspect the piers for their adequacy, or any requirement for remedial works or replacement.</p> |



**Image 2.** Site location: 8 The Crest, Frenchs Forest (© SIX Maps NSW Gov)

## Recommendations

With reference to the Australian Geomechanics Society's definitions, the existing conditions and proposed development are considered to constitute an '**ACCEPTABLE**' risk to life and a '**LOW**' risk to property provided that the recommendations outlined in **Table 2** are adhered to.

**Table 2.** Geotechnical Recommendations

| Recommendation         | Description  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Soil Excavation</b> | <p>Minor soil excavations will be required to establish any new pad levels and footings. It is anticipated that these excavations will encounter shallow disturbed fill, minor sandy clay and weathered sandstone bedrock. An accurate depth to bedrock is currently unknown; however, it is expected to be found at relatively shallow depths (&lt;1.0m) across the site, where not already exposed.</p> <p>Provided the shallow soil profile is battered back to form a slope not steeper than 35 degrees, they should stand unsupported for a short period until permanent support is in place. Unsupported batter slopes in sandy soil will be prone to erosion in inclement weather.</p> <p>If permanent batters are proposed, the unsupported batter must not be steeper than 30 degrees and should be protected from erosion by geotextile fabric pinned to the slope and planted with soil binding vegetation.</p>   |
| <b>Rock Excavation</b> | <p>All excavation recommendations as outlined below should be read in conjunction with Safe Work Australia's <i>Code of Practice: Excavation Work</i>, published in October 2018.</p> <p>It is essential that any excavation through rock that cannot be readily achieved with a bucket excavator or ripper should be carried out initially using a rock saw to minimise the vibration impact and disturbance on the adjoining properties, adjacent structures and sewer infrastructure. Any rock breaking must be carried out only after the rock has been sawed and in short bursts (2–5 seconds) to prevent the vibration amplifying. The break in the rock from the saw must be between the rock to be broken and the closest adjoining structure.</p> <p>Hand operated pneumatic picks may be used without restriction.</p> <p>All excavated material is to be removed from the site in accordance with current Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) regulations.</p> |
| <b>Vibrations</b>      | <p>The Australian Standard AS2670.1–2001 'Evaluation of human exposure to whole-body vibration General requirements. Part 1: General requirements, suggests a daytime limit of 5mm/s component PPV for human comfort is acceptable. In general, vibration criteria for human disturbance are more stringent than vibration criteria for effects on building contents and building structural damage. Hence, compliance with the more stringent limits dictated for human exposure, would ensure that compliance is also achieved for the other two categories.</p>   |



| Recommendation                        | Description  |   |  |  |                                       |           |   |           |                               |     |           |                   |    |            |  |           |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|---------------------------------------|-----------|---|-----------|-------------------------------|-----|-----------|-------------------|----|------------|--|-----------|
|                                       | <p>As such, we would suggest that the recommendations for method and/or equipment presented in the table below be adopted to maintain an allowable vibration limit of 5mm/s PPV.</p> <table><tr><th></th><th colspan="2">Maximum Peak Particle Velocity 5mm/sec</th></tr><tr><th>Distance from adjoining structure (m)</th><th>Equipment</th><th>Operating Limit (% of Maximum Capacity)</th></tr><tr><td>1.5 – 2.5</td><td>Hand operated jackhammer only</td><td>100</td></tr><tr><td>2.5 – 5.0</td><td>300kg rock hammer</td><td>50</td></tr><tr><td>5.0 – 10.0</td><td>300kg rock hammer or 600kg rock hammer</td><td>100 or 50</td></tr></table> <p>It may be necessary to move to smaller rock hammers or to rotary grinders or rock saws if vibrations limits cannot be met. (Manufactures of the plant should be contacted for information regarding peak vibration output.)</p> <p>The propagation of vibrations can be mitigated by pulsing the use of rock hammers, i.e., short bursts, utilising line sawing along boundaries.</p> <p><b>It is essential that at all times excavation equipment must be operated by experienced personnel, according to the manufacturer’s instructions and in a manner consistent with minimising vibration effects.</b></p> |   | Maximum Peak Particle Velocity 5mm/sec |  | Distance from adjoining structure (m) | Equipment | Operating Limit (% of Maximum Capacity) | 1.5 – 2.5 | Hand operated jackhammer only | 100 | 2.5 – 5.0 | 300kg rock hammer | 50 | 5.0 – 10.0 | 300kg rock hammer or 600kg rock hammer | 100 or 50 |
|                                       | Maximum Peak Particle Velocity 5mm/sec   |   |  |  |                                       |           |   |           |                               |     |           |                   |    |            |  |           |
| Distance from adjoining structure (m) | Equipment  | Operating Limit (% of Maximum Capacity) |  |  |                                       |           |   |           |                               |     |           |                   |    |            |  |           |
| 1.5 – 2.5                             | Hand operated jackhammer only  | 100                                     |  |  |                                       |           |   |           |                               |     |           |                   |    |            |  |           |
| 2.5 – 5.0                             | 300kg rock hammer  | 50                                      |  |  |                                       |           |   |           |                               |     |           |                   |    |            |  |           |
| 5.0 – 10.0                            | 300kg rock hammer or 600kg rock hammer   | 100 or 50                               |  |  |                                       |           |   |           |                               |     |           |                   |    |            |  |           |
| Excavation Support                    | <p>We would recommend that the unconsolidated material overlying bedrock be battered back to the appropriate angle, as outlined above. Exposed soil batters should be covered to prevent excessive infiltration or evaporation of moisture and to prevent erosion.</p> <p>Provided the appropriate batter angles mentioned above are achieved and any exposed soil batter is covered to prevent excessive infiltration or evaporation of moisture, no requirement for significant excavation support is anticipated.</p> <p>We would recommend that vertical rock excavation be set back a minimum of 250mm from any existing footings to be retained.</p> <p>The assumptions made in this report are based on our visual assessment and the known geology of the area. For more accurate information of depth to rock, rock strength and quality, additional ground testing may be required.</p>  |   |  |  |                                       |           |   |           |                               |     |           |                   |    |            |  |           |
| Retaining Structures                  | <p>Bulk unit weights of 20kN/m<sup>3</sup> and 22kN/m<sup>3</sup> should be adopted for the retained soil and weathered rock, respectively.</p>  |   |  |  |                                       |           |   |           |                               |     |           |                   |    |            |  |           |



| Recommendation                      | Description  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
|                                     | <p>Any retaining structures to be constructed as part of the site works are to be backfilled with suitable free-draining materials wrapped in a non-woven geotextile fabric (i.e. Bidim A34 or similar) to prevent the clogging of the drainage with sediment.</p> <p>Further geotechnical investigation may be required to provide adequate information of the design of earth retaining structures.</p>  |
| <b>Footings</b>                     | <p>We would recommend that all new footings are taken to and founded directly upon the underlying weathered bedrock using piers as required.</p> <p>The allowable bearing pressure for footings taken to competent weathered bedrock is <b>600kPa</b>. Higher allowable bearing capacities may be achievable subject to further testing and/or inspection and certification of excavated footings.</p> <p><b>It is essential that the foundation materials of all footing excavations be inspected and approved before steel reinforcement and concrete is placed. This inspection should be scheduled while excavation plant and operators are still on site, and before steel reinforcement has been fixed, or concrete booked.</b></p>  |
| <b>Fill</b>                         | <p>Any fill that may be required is to comprise local sand, clay, and weathered rock. Existing organic topsoil is to be cleared in preparation for the introduction of fill.</p> <p>Any new fill material is to be placed in layers not more than 250mm thick and compacted to not less than 95% of Standard Optimum Dry Density at plus or minus 2% of Standard Optimum Moisture Content.</p> <p>All new fill placement is to be carried out in accordance with AS 3798–2007 ‘Guidelines on earthworks for commercial and residential developments.’</p> <p>Fill should not be placed on the site outside of the lateral extent of new engineered retaining walls. The retaining walls should be in place prior to the placement of new fill, with suitable permanent and effective drainage of backfill.</p> |
| <b>Sediment and Erosion Control</b> | <p>Appropriate design and construction methods shall be required during site works to minimise erosion and provide sediment control. Any stockpiled soil will require erosion control measures, such as siltation fencing and barriers, to be designed by others.</p>  |

| Recommendation   | Description  |
|--|--|
| <b>Stormwater Disposal</b>                                       | <p>The effective management of ground and surface water on site may be the most important factor in the long-term performance of built structures, and the stability of the block more generally.</p> <p>It is essential that gutters, downpipes, drains, pipes, and connections are appropriately sized, functioning effectively, and discharging appropriately via non-erosive discharge.</p> <p>All stormwater collected from hard surfaces is to be collected and piped directly to the council stormwater network through any storage tanks or on-site detention that may be required by the regulating authorities, and in accordance with all relevant Australian Standards and the detailed stormwater management plan by others.</p> <p>Where discharge to council curb and gutter stormwater system, or easement, is not available, on-site stormwater management via non-erosive discharge such as dispersion, or absorption systems may be achievable subject to further testing to establish soil infiltration rates (if necessary), and the detailed stormwater management plan by others.</p> |
| <b>Inspections</b>   | <p>We would suggest that a remedial builder, or structural engineer be engaged to inspect the supporting piers for the pool, to assess their adequacy, or provide detail on any requirement for remedial works or replacement.</p> <p>It is essential that the foundation materials of any new footing excavations be inspected and approved by AscentGeo before steel reinforcement and concrete is placed.</p> <p><b>Failure to engage AscentGeo for the required hold point/excavation/foundation material inspections may negate our ability to provide final geotechnical sign off or certification.</b></p>  |
| <b>Conditions Relating to Design and Construction Monitoring</b> | <p>To comply with Northern Beaches Council conditions and/or Private Certifier requirements it may be necessary at the following stages for AscentGeo to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review the geotechnical content of all structural designs prior to the issue of Construction Certificate</li> <li>• complete the abovementioned excavation hold point and/or foundation material inspections during construction to ensure compliance to design with respect to stability and geotechnical design parameters</li> </ul>   |

| Recommendation | Description  |
|----------------|--|
|                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>at Occupation Certificate stage (project completion), AscentGeo must have inspected and certified excavations and foundation materials. A final site inspection may be required at this stage.</li></ul> |

Should you have any queries regarding this report, please do not hesitate to contact the author of this report, undersigned.

For and on behalf of **AscentGeo** Geotechnical Consulting,



**Ben Morgan** BSc, MAIG RPGeo  
Managing Director | Engineering Geologist



## References

Australian Geomechanics Society (March 2007), Landslide Risk Management, Australian Geomechanics 42(1).

Australian Standard 1289.6.3.2–1997 Methods of Testing Soils for Engineering Purposes.

Australian Standard 1726–2017 Geotechnical Site Investigations.

Australian Standard AS2670.1–2001 Evaluation of human exposure to whole-body vibration. Part 1: General requirements.

Australian Standard 2870–2011 Residential Slabs and Footings.

Australian Standard 3798–2007 Guidelines for Earthworks for Commercial and Residential Developments.

Herbert C., 1983, Sydney 1:100 000 Geological Sheet 9130, 1st edition. Geological Survey of New South Wales, Sydney.

Northern Beaches Council online mapping, Landslip Risk Map (WLEP 2011).

NSW Department of Finance, Services and Innovation, Spatial Information Viewer, [maps.six.nsw.gov.au](https://maps.six.nsw.gov.au).

Safe Work Australia (October 2018). Code of Practice: Excavation Work.



## Appendix A

### Information Sheets

# General Notes About This Report

## INTRODUCTION

These notes have been prepared by Ascent Geotechnical Consulting Pty Ltd (Ascent) to help our Clients interpret and understand the limitations of this report. Not all sections below are necessarily relevant to all reports.

## SCOPE OF SERVICES

This report has been prepared in accordance with the scope of services set out in Ascent's proposal under Ascent's Terms and Conditions, or as otherwise agreed with the Client. The scope of work may have been limited by a range of factors including time, budget, access and/or site constraints.

## RELIANCE ON INFORMATION PROVIDED

In preparing the report, Ascent has necessarily relied upon information provided by the Client and/or their Agents. Such data may include surveys, analyses, designs, maps and design plans. Ascent has not verified the accuracy or completeness of the data except as stated in this report.

## GEOTECHNICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

Geotechnical and environmental reporting relies on the interpretation of factual information, based on judgment and opinion, and is far less exact than other engineering or design disciplines.

Geotechnical and environmental reports are prepared for a specific purpose, development, and site, as described in the report, and may not contain sufficient information for other purposes, developments, or sites (including adjacent sites), other than that described in the report.

## SUBSURFACE CONDITIONS

Subsurface conditions can change with time and can vary between test locations. For example, the actual interface between the materials may be far more gradual or abrupt than indicated.

Therefore, actual conditions in areas not sampled may differ from those predicted, since no subsurface investigation, no matter how comprehensive, can reveal all subsurface details and anomalies.

Construction operations at or adjacent to the site and natural events such as floods, earthquakes or groundwater fluctuations can also affect subsurface conditions, and thus the continuing adequacy of a geotechnical report. Ascent should be kept informed of any such events, and should be retained to identify variances, conduct additional tests if required, and recommend solutions to problems encountered on site.

## GROUNDWATER

Groundwater levels indicated on borehole and test pit logs are recorded at specific times. Depending on ground permeability, measured levels may or may not reflect actual levels if measured over a longer time period. Also, groundwater levels and seepage inflows may fluctuate with seasonal and environmental variations and construction activities.

## INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Data obtained from nominated discrete locations, subsequent laboratory testing and empirical or external sources are interpreted by trained professionals in order to provide an opinion about overall site conditions, their likely impact with respect to the report purpose and recommended actions in accordance with any relevant industry standards, guidelines or procedures.

## SOIL AND ROCK DESCRIPTIONS

Soil and rock descriptions are based on AS 1726 – 1993, using visual and tactile assessment, except at discrete locations where field and / or laboratory tests have been carried out. Refer to the accompanying soil and rock terms sheet for further information.

## COPYRIGHT AND REPRODUCTION

The contents of this document are and remain the intellectual property of Ascent. This document should only be used for the purpose for which it was commissioned and should not be used for other projects, or by a third party without written permission from Ascent.

This report shall not be reproduced either totally or in part without the permission of Ascent. Where information from this report is to be included in contract documents or engineering specification for the project, the entire report should be included in order to minimise the likelihood of misinterpretation.

## FURTHER ADVICE

Ascent would be pleased to further discuss how any of the above issues could affect a specific project. We would also be pleased to provide further advice or assistance including:

- Assessment of suitability of designs and construction techniques;
- Contract documentation and specification;
- Construction advice (foundation assessments, excavation support).

# Abbreviations, Notes & Symbols

## SUBSURFACE INVESTIGATION

### METHOD

#### Borehole Logs

|     |                        |
|-----|------------------------|
| AS# | Auger screwing (#-bit) |
| AD# | Auger drilling (#-bit) |
| B   | Blank bit              |
| V   | V-bit                  |
| T   | TC-bit                 |
| HA  | Hand auger             |
| R   | Roller/tricone         |
| W   | Washbore               |
| AH  | Air hammer             |
| AT  | Air track              |
| LB  | Light bore push tube   |
| MC  | Macro core push tube   |
| DT  | Dual core push tube    |

#### Excavation Logs

|    |                          |
|----|--------------------------|
| BH | Backhoe/excavator bucket |
| NE | Natural exposure         |
| HE | Hand excavation          |
| X  | Existing excavation      |

#### Cored Borehole Logs

|       |                        |
|-------|------------------------|
| NMLC  | NMLC core drilling     |
| NQ/HQ | Wireline core drilling |

### SUPPORT

#### Borehole Logs

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| C | Casing |
| M | Mud    |

#### Excavation Logs

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| S | Shoring |
| B | Benched |

### SAMPLING

|    |                                       |
|----|---------------------------------------|
| B  | Bulk sample                           |
| D  | Disturbed sample                      |
| U# | Thin-walled tube sample (#mmdiameter) |
| ES | Environmental sample                  |
| EW | Environmental water sample            |

### FIELD TESTING

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| PP             | Pocket penetrometer (kPa)                                  |
| DCP            | Dynamic cone penetrometer                                  |
| PSP            | Perth sand penetrometer                                    |
| SPT            | Standard penetration test                                  |
| PBT            | Plate bearing test   |
| s <sub>u</sub> | Vane shear strength peak/residual (kPa) and vane size (mm) |
| N*             | SPT (blows per 300mm)                                      |
| Nc             | SPT with solid cone  |
| R              | Refusal  |

*\*denotes sample taken*

### BOUNDARIES

|       |          |
|-------|----------|
| ————  | Known    |
| ----- | Probable |
| ..... | Possible |

## SOIL

### MOISTURE CONDITION

|    |                  |
|----|------------------|
| D  | Dry              |
| M  | Moist            |
| W  | Wet              |
| Wp | Plastic Limit    |
| WL | Liquid Limit     |
| MC | Moisture Content |

### CONSISTENCY

|     |            |
|-----|------------|
| VS  | Very Soft  |
| S   | Soft       |
| F   | Firm       |
| St  | Stiff      |
| VSt | Very Stiff |
| H   | Hard       |
| Fb  | Friable    |

### DENSITY INDEX

|    |              |
|----|--------------|
| VL | Very Loose   |
| L  | Loose        |
| MD | Medium Dense |
| D  | Dense        |
| VD | Very Dense   |

### USCS SYMBOLS

|    |  |
|----|--|
| GW | Well graded gravels and gravel-sand mixtures, little or no fines   |
| GP | Poorly graded gravels and gravel-sand mixtures, little or no fines |
| GM | Silty gravels, gravel-sand-silt mixtures                           |
| GC | Clayey gravels, gravel-sand-clay mixtures                          |

|    |  |
|----|--|
| SW | Well graded sands and gravelly sands, little or no fines                                   |
| SP | Poorly graded sands and gravelly sands, little or no fines                                 |
| SM | Silty sand, sand-silt mixtures   |
| SC | Clayey sand, sand-clay mixtures  |
| ML | Inorganic silts of low plasticity, very fine sands, rock flour, silty or clayey fine sands |
| CL | Inorganic clays of low to medium plasticity, gravelly clays, sandy clays, silty clays      |
| OL | Organic silts and organic silty clays of low plasticity                                    |
| MH | Inorganic silts of high plasticity   |
| CH | Inorganic clays of high plasticity   |
| OH | Organic clays of medium to high plasticity   |
| PT | Peat muck and other highly organic soils   |

## ROCK

### WEATHERING

|     |                      |
|-----|----------------------|
| RS  | Residual Soil        |
| XW  | Extremely Weathered  |
| HW  | Highly Weathered     |
| MW  | Moderately Weathered |
| DW* | Distinctly Weathered |
| SW  | Slightly Weathered   |
| FR  | Fresh                |

*\*covers both HW & MW*

### STRENGTH

|    |                |
|----|----------------|
| EL | Extremely Low  |
| VL | Very Low       |
| L  | Low            |
| M  | Medium         |
| H  | High           |
| VH | Very High      |
| EH | Extremely High |

### ROCK QUALITY DESIGNATION (%)

=  $\frac{\text{sum of intact core pieces} > 100\text{mm}}{\text{total length of section being evaluated}} \times 100$

### CORE RECOVERY (%)

=  $\frac{\text{core recovered}}{\text{core lift}} \times 100$

### NATURAL FRACTURES

#### Type

|    |                |
|----|----------------|
| JT | Joint          |
| BP | Bedding plane  |
| SM | Seam           |
| FZ | Fractured zone |
| SZ | Shear zone     |
| VN | Vein           |

#### Infill or Coating

|    |            |
|----|------------|
| Cn | Clean      |
| St | Stained    |
| Vn | Veneer     |
| Co | Coating    |
| Cl | Clay       |
| Ca | Calcite    |
| Fe | Iron oxide |
| Mi | Micaceous  |
| Qz | Quartz     |

#### Shape

|    |           |
|----|-----------|
| pl | Planar    |
| cu | Curved    |
| un | Undulose  |
| st | Stepped   |
| ir | Irregular |

#### Roughness

|     |              |
|-----|--------------|
| pol | Polished     |
| slk | Slickensided |
| smo | Smooth       |
| rou | Rough        |



# Soil & Rock Terms

## SOIL

### MOISTURE CONDITION

| Term  | Description   |
|-------|---|
| Dry   | Looks and feels dry. Cohesive and cemented soils are hard, friable or powdery. Uncemented granular soils run freely through the hand. |
| Moist | Feels cool and darkened in colour. Cohesive soils can be moulded. Granular soils tend to cohere.                                      |
| Wet   | As for moist, but with free water forming on hands when handled.  |

For cohesive soils, moisture content may also be described in relation to plastic limit ( $W_p$ ) or liquid limit ( $W_L$ ). [ $>>$  much greater than,  $>$  greater than,  $<$  less than,  $<<$  much less than].

### CONSISTENCY

| Term      | c (kPa)      | Term       | c (kPa)      |
|-----------|--------------|------------|--------------|
|           | <sup>u</sup> |            | <sup>u</sup> |
| Very Soft | $< 12$       | Very Stiff | 100 - 200    |
| Soft      | 12 - 25      | Hard       | $> 200$      |
| Firm      | 25 - 50      | Friable    | -            |
| Stiff     | 50 - 100     |            |              |

### DENSITY INDEX

| Term         | I <sub>D</sub> (%) | Term       | I <sub>D</sub> (%) |
|--------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Very Loose   | $< 15$             | Dense      | 65 - 8             |
| Loose        | 15 - 35            | Very Dense | $> 85$             |
| Medium Dense | 35 - 65            |            |                    |

### PARTICLE SIZE

| Name        | Subdivision | Size (mm)   |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Boulders    |             | $> 200$     |
| Cobbles     |             | 63 - 200    |
| Gravel      | coarse      | 20 - 63     |
|             | medium      | 6 - 20      |
|             | fine        | 2.36 - 6    |
| Sand        | coarse      | 0.6 - 2.36  |
|             | medium      | 0.2 - 0.6   |
|             | fine        | 0.075 - 0.2 |
| Silt & Clay |             | $< 0.075$   |

### MINOR COMPONENTS

| Term  | Proportion by Mass coarse grained | fine grained |
|-------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Trace | $\leq 5\%$                        | $\leq 15\%$  |
| Some  | 5 - 2%                            | 15 - 30%     |

### SOIL ZONING

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Layers  | Continuous exposures                       |
| Lenses  | Discontinuous layers of lenticular shape   |
| Pockets | Irregular inclusions of different material |

### SOIL CEMENTING

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Weakly     | Easily broken up by hand                        |
| Moderately | Effort is required to break up the soil by hand |

### SOIL STRUCTURE

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Massive | Coherent, with any partings both vertically and horizontally spaced at greater than 100mm                        |
| Weak    | Peds indistinct and barely observable on pit face. When disturbed approx. 30% consist of peds smaller than 100mm |
| Strong  | Peds are quite distinct in undisturbed soil. When disturbed $>60\%$ consists of peds smaller than 100mm          |

## ROCK

### SEDIMENTARY ROCK TYPE DEFINITIONS

| Rock Type    | Definition (more than 50% of rock consists of....)                   |
|--------------|--|
| Conglomerate | ... gravel sized ( $> 2\text{mm}$ ) fragments                        |
| Sandstone    | ... sand sized (0.06 to 2mm) grains                                  |
| Siltstone    | ... silt sized ( $<0.06\text{mm}$ ) particles, rock is not laminated |
| Claystone    | ... clay, rock is not laminated                                      |
| Shale        | ... silt or clay sized particles, rock is laminated                  |

### STRENGTH

| Term          | Is50 (MPa) | Term           | Is50 (MPa) |
|---------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| Extremely Low | $< 0.03$   | High           | 1 - 3      |
| Very Low      | 0.03 - 0.1 | Very High      | 3 - 10     |
| Low           | 0.1 - 0.3  | Extremely High | $> 10$     |
| Medium        | 0.3 - 1    |                |            |

### WEATHERING

| Term                 | Description   |
|----------------------|---|
| Residual Soil        | Soil developed on extremely weathered rock; the mass structure and substance fabric are no longer evident   |
| Extremely Weathered  | Rock is weathered to such an extent that it has 'soil' properties, i.e. it either disintegrates or can be remoulded, in water. Fabric of original rock is still visible |
| Highly Weathered     | Rock strength usually highly changed by weathering; rock may be highly discoloured  |
| Moderately Weathered | Rock strength usually moderately changed by weathering; rock may be moderately discoloured  |
| Distinctly Weathered | See 'Highly Weathered' or 'Moderately Weathered'  |
| Slightly Weathered   | Rock is slightly discoloured but shows little or no change of strength from fresh rock  |
| Fresh                | Rock shows no signs of decomposition or staining  |

### NATURAL FRACTURES

| Type          | Description   |
|---------------|---|
| Joint         | A discontinuity or crack across which the rock has little or no tensile strength. May be open or closed   |
| Bedding plane | Arrangement in layers of mineral grains of similar sizes or composition   |
| Seam          | Seam with deposited soil (infill), extremely weathered insitu rock (XW), or disoriented usually angular fragments of the host rock (crushed)                                    |
| Shear zone    | Zone with roughly parallel planar boundaries, of rock material intersected by closely spaced (generally $< 50\text{mm}$ ) joints and /or microscopic fracture (cleavage) planes |
| Vein          | Intrusion of any shape dissimilar to the adjoining rock mass. Usually igneous   |








































| Shape     | Description                       |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Planar    | Consistent orientation            |
| Curved    | Gradual change in orientation     |
| Undulose  | Wavy surface                      |
| Stepped   | One or more well defined steps    |
| Irregular | Many sharp changes in orientation |

| Infill or Coating | Description   |
|-------------------|---|
| Clean             | No visible coating or discolouring  |
| Stained           | No visible coating but surfaces are discoloured                                 |
| Veneer            | A visible coating of soil or mineral, too thin to measure; may be patchy        |
| Coating           | Visible coating $\leq 1\text{mm}$ thick. Ticker soil material described as seam |

| Roughness    | Description  |
|--------------|--|
| Polished     | Shiny smooth surface   |
| Slickensided | Grooved or striated surface, usually polished  |
| Smooth       | Smooth to touch. Few or no surface irregularities  |
| Rough        | Many small surface irregularities (amplitude generally $< 1\text{mm}$ ). Feels like fine to coarse sandpaper |

Note: soil and rock descriptions are generally in accordance with AS1726-1993 Geotechnical Site Investigations

# Graphic Symbols Index

| Soil  |               | Rock  |                            | Water Measurements  |                           |
|---|---------------|---|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|
|    | Fill          |    | Sandstone                  |  | Level at time of drilling |
|    | Peat, Topsoil |    | Shale                      |  | Level after drilling      |
|    | Clay          |    | Clayey Shale               |  | Inflow                    |
|    | Silty Clay    |    | Siltstone                  |  | Outflow                   |
|    | Gravelly Clay |    | Conglomerate               |   |                           |
|    | Sandy Clay    |    | Claystone                  |   |                           |
|    | Silt          |    | Dolerite, Basalt           |   |                           |
|    | Sandy Silt    |    | Granite                    |   |                           |
|   | Clayey Silt   |   | Limestone                  |   |                           |
|  | Gravelly Silt |  | Tuff                       |   |                           |
|  | Gravel        |  | Coarse grained Metamorphic |   |                           |
|  | Sandy Gravel  |  | Medium grained Metamorphic |   |                           |
|  | Clayey Gravel |  | Fine grained Metamorphic   |   |                           |
|  | Silty Gravel  |  | Coal                       |   |                           |
|  | Sand          |   |                            |   |                           |
|  | Gravelly Sand | <b>Other</b>  |                            |   |                           |
|  | Silty Sand    |  | Asphalt                    |   |                           |
|  | Clayey Sand   |  | Concrete                   |   |                           |
|   |               |  | Brick                      |   |                           |

# Foundation Maintenance and Footing Performance: A Homeowner's Guide



CSIRO  
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 perpend).

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.

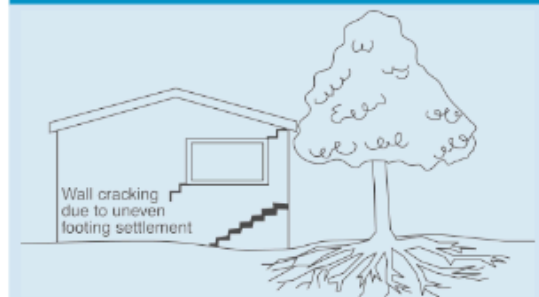
#### Seasonal swelling/shrinkage in clay

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.

#### Trees can cause shrinkage and damage



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               |





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.

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Freecall 1800 645 051 Tel (03) 9662 7666 Fax (03) 9662 7555 www.publish.csiro.au

Email: publishing.sales@csiro.au

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## EXAMPLES OF **GOOD** HILLSIDE PRACTICE



## EXAMPLES OF **POOR** HILLSIDE PRACTICE





PRACTICE NOTE GUIDELINES FOR LANDSLIDE RISK MANAGEMENT 2007

APPENDIX C: LANDSLIDE RISK ASSESSMENT

QUALITATIVE TERMINOLOGY FOR USE IN ASSESSING RISK TO PROPERTY

QUALITATIVE MEASURES OF LIKELIHOOD

| Approximate Annual Probability |                    | Implied Indicative Landslide Recurrence Interval |               | Description  | Descriptor      | Level |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--|---------------|--|-----------------|-------|
| Indicative Value               | Notional Boundary  |  |               |  |                 |       |
| 10 <sup>-1</sup>               | 5x10 <sup>-2</sup> | 10 years   | 20 years      | The event is expected to occur over the design life.<br>The event will probably occur under adverse conditions over the design life. | ALMOST CERTAIN  | A     |
| 10 <sup>-2</sup>               | 5x10 <sup>-3</sup> | 100 years  |               |  |                 |       |
| 10 <sup>-3</sup>               | 5x10 <sup>-4</sup> | 1000 years                                       | 200 years     | The event could occur under adverse conditions over the design life.   | POSSIBLE        | C     |
| 10 <sup>-4</sup>               | 5x10 <sup>-5</sup> | 10,000 years                                     | 2000 years    | The event might occur under very adverse circumstances over the design life.   | UNLIKELY        | D     |
| 10 <sup>-5</sup>               | 5x10 <sup>-6</sup> | 100,000 years                                    | 20,000 years  | The event is conceivable but only under exceptional circumstances over the design life.  | RARE            | E     |
| 10 <sup>-6</sup>               |                    | 1,000,000 years                                  | 200,000 years | The event is inconceivable or fanciful over the design life.   | BARELY CREDIBLE | F     |

Note: (1) The table should be used from left to right; use Approximate Annual Probability or Description to assign Descriptor, not *vice versa*.

QUALITATIVE MEASURES OF CONSEQUENCES TO PROPERTY

| Approximate Cost of Damage |                   | Description   | Descriptor    | Level |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---|---------------|-------|
| Indicative Value           | Notional Boundary |   |               |       |
| 200%                       | 100%              | Structure(s) completely destroyed and/or large scale damage requiring major engineering works for stabilisation. Could cause at least one adjacent property major consequence damage.           | CATASTROPHIC  | 1     |
| 60%                        | 40%               | Extensive damage to most of structure, and/or extending beyond site boundaries requiring significant stabilisation works. Could cause at least one adjacent property medium consequence damage. | MAJOR         | 2     |
| 20%                        | 10%               | Moderate damage to some of structure, and/or significant part of site requiring large stabilisation works.  | MEDIUM        | 3     |
| 5%                         | 1%                | Could cause at least one adjacent property minor consequence damage.  | MINOR         | 4     |
| 0.5%                       |                   | Limited damage to part of structure, and/or part of site requiring some reinstatement stabilisation works.  | INSIGNIFICANT | 5     |
| Notes:                     |                   | Little damage. (Note for high probability event (Almost Certain), this category may be subdivided at a notional boundary of 0.1%. See Risk Matrix.)   |               |       |

(2) The Approximate Cost of Damage is expressed as a percentage of market value, being the cost of the improved value of the unaffected property which includes the land plus the unaffected structures.

(3) The Approximate Cost is to be an estimate of the direct cost of the damage, such as the cost of reinstatement of the damaged portion of the property (land plus structures), stabilisation works required to render the site to tolerable risk level for the landslide which has occurred and professional design fees, and consequential costs such as legal fees, temporary accommodation. It does not include additional stabilisation works to address other landslides which may affect the property.

(4) The table should be used from left to right; use Approximate Cost of Damage or Description to assign Descriptor, not *vice versa*

**PRACTICE NOTE GUIDELINES FOR LANDSLIDE RISK MANAGEMENT 2007**  
**APPENDIX C: – QUALITATIVE TERMINOLOGY FOR USE IN ASSESSING RISK TO PROPERTY (CONTINUED)**

**QUALITATIVE RISK ANALYSIS MATRIX – LEVEL OF RISK TO PROPERTY**

| LIKELIHOOD          |  | CONSEQUENCES TO PROPERTY (With Indicative Approximate Cost of Damage) |                 |                  |                |                             |
|---------------------|--|---|-----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
|                     | Indicative Value of Approximate Annual Probability | 1: CATASTROPHIC<br>200%   | 2: MAJOR<br>60% | 3: MEDIUM<br>20% | 4: MINOR<br>5% | 5:<br>INSIGNIFICANT<br>0.5% |
| A – ALMOST CERTAIN  | 10 <sup>-1</sup>                                   | VH  | VH              | VH               | H              | M or L (S)                  |
| B - LIKELY          | 10 <sup>-2</sup>                                   | VH  | VH              | H                | M              | L                           |
| C - POSSIBLE        | 10 <sup>-3</sup>                                   | VH  | H               | M                | M              | VL                          |
| D - UNLIKELY        | 10 <sup>-4</sup>                                   | H   | M               | L                | L              | VL                          |
| E - RARE            | 10 <sup>-5</sup>                                   | M   | L               | L                | VL             | VL                          |
| F - BARELY CREDIBLE | 10 <sup>-6</sup>                                   | L   | VL              | VL               | VL             | VL                          |

**Notes:** (5) For Cell A5, may be subdivided such that a consequence of less than 0.1% is Low Risk.  
(6) When considering a risk assessment it must be clearly stated whether it is for existing conditions or with risk control measures which may not be implemented at the current time.

**RISK LEVEL IMPLICATIONS**

| Risk Level |                | Example Implications (7)  |
|------------|----------------|---|
| VH         | VERY HIGH RISK | Unacceptable without treatment. Extensive detailed investigation and research, planning and implementation of treatment options essential to reduce risk to Low; may be too expensive and not practical. Work likely to cost more than value of the property.             |
| H          | HIGH RISK      | Unacceptable without treatment. Detailed investigation, planning and implementation of treatment options required to reduce risk to Low. Work would cost a substantial sum in relation to the value of the property.  |
| M          | MODERATE RISK  | May be tolerated in certain circumstances (subject to regulator's approval) but requires investigation, planning and implementation of treatment options to reduce the risk to Low. Treatment options to reduce to Low risk should be implemented as soon as practicable. |
| L          | LOW RISK       | Usually acceptable to regulators. Where treatment has been required to reduce the risk to this level, ongoing maintenance is required.  |
| VL         | VERY LOW RISK  | Acceptable. Manage by normal slope maintenance procedures.  |

**Note:** (7) The implications for a particular situation are to be determined by all parties to the risk assessment and may depend on the nature of the property at risk; these are only given as a general guide.