

Key points emerging from the days presentations and discussions by David Card from the NFU :

- wood burners and flues are relatively new installations to old buildings and are suspected as a common denominator that may explain why there is an increase in thatch fires
- if old fashioned open fires with large inglenook chimneys were a serious fire risk we would not have many thatch properties left
- the threat to thatch is posed by both radiated heat and embers/sparks. Experts do not wholly agree as to which is the major cause.
- the nature of thatch fires whether produced by radiated heat or embers is that the smoldering goes deep into the thatch and the ignition point is reached deep down before a flame is produced followed by an all consuming fire
- Given the deep rooted fire well away from the surface with air drawn to the fire along the length of the straws (that act like mini chimneys) makes traditional fire fighting difficult as the water cannot get to the source of the fire with the thatch effectively shedding the water
- spark arresters when bunged up create more problems and would be better removed
- cowling tops are best left off so the higher velocity created by flues ejects any hot debris higher into the sky without hotter embers being deflected back to the thatch roof
- a sealed top and bottom chimney should have a breather brick to prevent pressure and heat buildup between the liner and the old chimney breast
- a significant number of thatch fires occur within a hour or so of lighting. So development and publicity for a better lighting technique may well be a practical and quick win initiative to reduce thatch fires
- common sense (which fortunately the majority of thatch owners do have) is key (no bonfires, fire pits, BBQ fireworks close to thatch, no naked flame from workmen in the roof space, fire extinguishers and fire blankets)
- educate neighbours to be thatch aware

- dampen down thatch with water from a hose pipe around the 5th Nov!!!!
- prevention is better than cure. Fire walls, heat/smoke detectors etc alert you to the problem although it could be too late to stop the fire
- setting an adequate sum insured is essential and understanding your insurance terms and compliance to warranties is essential before you have the fire.
- lobbying to have zero VAT for buildings works on listed buildings would eliminate one source of "sum insured" uncertainty
- lobbying to have zero insurance premium tax (currently 6%) on listed buildings rewards current owners for taking out insurance to protect our heritage. Why should they pay the government 6% when the same government has imposed listed conditions on how they live in their homes?