Domestic alterations and extensions guide

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**Purpose of this guide**

Good design is a key principle of the planning process and is a fundamental component of an attractive built environment. By encouraging better design of householder developments we can positively shape the places in which we live. It is often the smaller developments that cumulatively shape the characteristics of an area and this document is targeted at that level in the planning process. Good design creates an attractive environment and adds to the value of the property.

This guide indicates the design expectations of Cornwall Council and is to be used as guidance for householder applications. Whilst the guide is used for planning purposes, the document has been produced in line with current building regulation standards.

The guide is not intended to dictate or to stifle innovative and contemporary design. It is to be used as guidance outlining general principles and guidelines to follow and facilitate good design for householder developments.

**What is good design?**

Good design is a process rather than a product, it evolves from careful understanding of place and context. Whilst there is no blueprint for good design there are a number of key principles which can be followed that raise the standard of submissions which in turn improves the likely acceptance of the proposal to Cornwall Council.

Design is not just about visual impact. It changes the way in which we live and how our home environments function. A bad design can adversely affect your own living environment or that of your neighbours, as much as it can affect the characteristics of an area.

Ultimately, good design constitutes inclusive design. That means that you are required to design your proposal to ensure accessibility for future uses as well as yourself. You therefore need to take into account access for all, including the young, disabled and elderly. You need to consider your property as a home for life.

**The design process...**

1. **Decide to alter or extend**
2. **Analyse your requirements**
3. **Check the capacity and character of your house (what is possible?)**
4. **Check the proposals against the settings of the house**
5. **Submit application**
6. **Approvals**

- Will you be appointing an architect or agent who will consider these aspects with you?
- Check with the building regulations
- Check with this guide and/or discuss with neighbours and your local parish/town council
- Include the adjacent properties and setting in your application drawings
- Have you considered all the options?
Before you start

Planning and Building Regulations explained

Planning seeks to guide the way our towns, cities and countryside develop. This includes the use of land and buildings, the appearance of buildings, landscaping considerations, highway access and the impact that the development will have on the general environment.

Building Regulations set standards for the design and construction of buildings to ensure the safety and health for people in or about those buildings. They also include requirements to ensure that fuel and power is conserved and facilities are provided for people, including those with disabilities, to access and move around inside buildings.

Do I need permission?

Under regulations issued for England by the Government it is possible to carry out certain changes to your home without any need for planning permission, though it may still be necessary to obtain Building Regulation approval.

These national planning exemptions, referred to as ‘permitted development rights’, can be withdrawn locally by conditions attached to planning permissions for dwelling houses and are modified if you live in a conservation area or listed building, separate provisions also apply for flats.

For a simple guide to these national regulations as to when planning permission may be required, see separate guidance on householder permitted development or visit the interactive house on the planning portal website at: www.planningportal.gov.uk.

However, before proceeding with a project you may wish to clarify the position with the Planning and Building Control service. To do this you can use the ‘Do I need planning permission or Building Regulations?’ form which is available to download from the Council’s website or at planning receptions.

This form should be returned to the local planning office accompanied by the required information and fee - check the website for latest fees (to cover the planning element).

Separate consents may be required if the property is a listed building, demolition is undertaken in a conservation area or works are required to a protected tree.

Additional Information

You will also find a lot of very useful information on the planning portal website at: http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/permission/ which shows what may and what may not be acceptable householder development.

Please discuss any proposals that you might wish to make with the occupiers and owners of neighbouring properties to ensure that the proposal does not adversely affect their amenity.

It is also advisable to inform your local parish town or City Council.

Unless the proposal is for alterations or extensions to a listed building we do not provide bespoke advice.

Understanding the planning policy context and designations

When planning permission is needed it is important to understand the constraints on your property as these will affect the acceptability of your proposal in line with the planning policies used by the Council. What may be permissible on a modern dwelling is not necessarily acceptable on a traditional property. Historic properties, especially listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas, are particularly sensitive to alteration and in these cases it is suggested that you view pre-application advice.

All extensions to and some alterations which change the external fabric of a listed building or new buildings within its curtilage will require planning permission. In addition, any internal or external alterations, even fairly minor proposals such as re-decoration and re-pointing are likely to also require listed building consent, always check with the conservation officer.

Conservation areas are protected for their architectural and historical interest. Planning policies require development to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a conservation area. In the majority of cases extensions and additions which front a highway in a conservation area will require planning permission, there are also greater restrictions on alterations to the rear of dwellings, buildings within the curtilage, alterations to roofs, cladding, balconies, raised platforms and satellite dishes. This list is by no means exhaustive and it is always recommended that you check prior to undertaking works in a conservation area in order to establish if permission is required. Some conservation areas have article 4
directions removing certain classes of permitted development rights and in these cases alterations such as replacing windows and doors or the removal of front boundary walls and other alterations may require planning permission.

Conservation area consent may also be required for the demolition of some buildings and boundary walls.

**Landscape designations** are also important factors in the determination of planning applications. All landscape characteristics are material considerations in assessing the capability of accepting new development. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Heritage Coasts, Coastal Zones, Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), and Open Areas of Local Significance (OALS), have been designated because of their landscape qualities. Developments in these locations are required to, at an absolute minimum, preserve the special characteristics of these areas. Further information and guidance on how to interpret existing landscape character and to analyse the impact new development will have upon it can be found at [www.cornwalllandscapes.org.uk](http://www.cornwalllandscapes.org.uk).

The Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape **World Heritage Site** (WHS) which was designated in 2007 covers both urban and rural areas. When considering alterations to properties in the WHS it is important to understand the principles behind its designation and to research the contribution your property may have upon the site’s heritage status.

You should also check whether your property contains any trees that are protected. **Tree Preservation Orders** can be placed on individual trees, woodlands or a particular area. The order protects trees above and below ground. If your proposal affects a protected tree then consent will be needed from Cornwall Council. You may wish to view the following document produced by Central Government - **Tree Preservation Orders: A Guide to the Law and Good Practice**.

It should also be noted that anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop, uproot, damage or destroy certain **trees in a Conservation Area**, such as those with a trunk diameter of more than 75 millimetres, measured 1.5 metres above ground level, whether or not it is covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), is required to give 6 weeks written notice to the Local Planning Authority.

It is also important to note that historical and landscape designations do not mean that such areas are frozen in time. They are not as overwhelming as they may first appear. The Council accepts that change is often necessary to accommodate the demands of modern living, the challenge is to enhance the characteristics of these areas, as with all developments, through good design.

**First considerations**

**How to be considerate to your neighbour?**

However acceptable the design, if the proposal has a significant adverse impact on the living environment of your neighbours or of your own property, the application will be refused. Consideration of residential amenity is a fundamental element of good design. Outlook, privacy and daylight are factors which impact upon the living environments of a property. Private matters such as a right of way, loss of a property’s value or loss of a private view are not planning considerations.

The outlook from a property concerns the provision of a suitable environment to be viewed from the room the window will serve, generally the more social the room, the greater the outlook it will require. For example, a two metre high wall located within close proximity of a living room window would be physically overbearing on the outlook from the room and would harm the living environment of that property however, such a situation may be acceptable for a bathroom or utility room.

Loss of privacy relates to both internal and external space. It would be totally unacceptable to permit an extension that would allow open views into a bedroom or over a neighbour’s only private outdoor space. As a general rule, 21 metres distance between directly facing windows is viewed as an acceptable distance to retain internal privacy. Other options are to consider the use of rooflights, or positioning bathrooms served by obscure glazed windows, in the positions that may cause privacy implications.

A common objection from neighbours is that your proposal will cut out a lot of light from their windows. An extension behind a line drawn at an angle of 45 degrees from the centre line of your neighbour’s nearest ground floor window is less likely to affect them. Two storey rear extensions are more likely to cut out neighbour’s light than a single storey one and should not normally be built on the boundary. See diagram over page.
Design principles

This part of guide deals with design principles to be considered while shaping the extension/alterations to the house. Well designed extensions positively address and retain the essence of the context.

What is context?

Any building is read in the place in which it is situated. It forms part of its surroundings whether in the open countryside, a hamlet, village or town. When thinking about extending or altering your house it is important to reflect the characteristics of the area, in particular the immediate neighbourhood.

If the design of an extension respects the layout, scale, building form, proportion, materials, details and distinguishing features of your house and surrounding context it will be likely to enhance the property and not detract from its character.

The house in its context

Layout

The size and shape of the site, the position of the existing house on the plot, the relationship of the front of the house to the building line and the need to retain privacy, outlook and daylight for neighbours, can all have a substantial effect on the possibilities for an extension. Added to this there may also be questions about orientation to achieve good sunlight, view and the relationship with any trees on the site or an adjacent site.

The best location for an extension will be determined by aligning it with the house, or in some cases relating it to boundary. Awkwardly angled extensions can result in waste of remaining garden space.
Scale

An extension should not dominate the existing building in shape or size. In general terms it should be smaller than the original house and should be narrower in width, shorter in depth and lower in height than the existing property to keep a co-ordinated overall look.

Building form

The spaces in between and around properties are an important factor in defining local characteristics as the built form.

The roof of the extension should complement the original house in design. Flat roofs unless designed appropriately with high standards are unlikely to be approved. The ridge and eaves should be lower than the original building and the roof should maintain the same pitch. At this stage it is important to ensure that it is possible to ventilate the roof void once complete.

Proportions

The proportions of building, doors and windows form a key component of its character. Extensions that detract from or conflict with the proportions of the original building are unlikely to be approved.

Materials

The size, colour and texture of the materials used on an extension should match or complement the existing building. The transition of materials between the original building and extension needs to ensure it is not visually intrusive. The materials and construction details should be robust to withstand weathering and maintain its aesthetic appeal in the long term.

New work (shaded) is set back to allow the corner of the original building to be maintained and ‘read’.
Details and distinguishing features

It is often seen that details and distinctive features of houses and surrounding properties form a distinctive identity of an area. These may take the form of distinct stonework, details or fenestrations around doors, windows and eaves.

The design of an extension should reflect these key features in order to retain the essence of the place. Integrating new development from a design perspective is subjective and there are always exceptions to the above. However, these principles should be followed as a starting point and any variations will need justifying in a design and access statement accompanying your application to explain the inspiration behind your design.

Innovative and contemporary alterations

The Council is always open to consider inspirational alternatives to the norm. However, successful innovative and contemporary design is often extremely difficult to achieve and such a route should be proceeded with caution. It is suggested that a qualified architect prepare your proposal.

Design and access statements

If your site falls within a Conservation Area, a World Heritage Site, a Site of Special Scientific Interest or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty it is a statutory duty to submit a design and access statement with your application. Such a document explains the design thinking behind your planning application and shows that you have thought carefully about how everyone, including disabled people, older people and very young children, will be able to use the places that you want to build.

It is suggested that a design and access statement is one of the first processes that you undertake. For further information on the completion of design and access statements you may wish to refer to the Council document ‘Producing Design and Access Statements for Householder Applications’. For alterations to listed buildings you should produce a heritage statement which includes an assessment of the architectural and historic interest of the building and explains how the proposal will impact on the significance of the building and it’s setting and it’s features. This can be incorporated into the design and access statement.

What happens when the application is submitted?

Once your application is submitted it will go through the registration process with the Council to ensure that all the appropriate and correct information has been submitted. You may wish to refer to the validation document for more detailed information on what is required to be submitted relative to your type of application and constraints relative to your property.

When the application is validated it will be passed to the case officer who will deal with the processing of your application. The case officer is likely to visit the site within the next couple of weeks to assess your proposal. In addition, neighbours, statutory consultees (such as the local mains water supplier and the Environment Agency) and your local Town or Parish Council will be notified of the application.

If the case officer feels that there are minor alterations that would make the proposal acceptable and that will not require re-notification, they are likely to contact you with suggested amendments. Otherwise the application will be processed and either approved, usually with conditions, or refused. If you are unhappy with any of the conditions attached or your application has been refused you have a right to appeal to the Secretary of State. For more information on appeals see www.planningportal.gov.uk or www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk.

What about Building Regulation requirements?

It is a statutory requirement to gain Building Regulations approval for any extension to your property, internal alterations, new and replacement openings, structural changes or any alterations that affect a thermal element, ie reroofing. Detached buildings under 30 sq m in floor area and at least 1 metre away from boundaries are exempt from the Building Regulations, subject to them containing no sleeping accommodation and consisting of a ground storey only.
It is important to take account of Building Regulation requirements at an early stage and certainly before finalising your proposal to check that your scheme will still provide you with what you want.

For example, the Regulations require external walls, roof spaces and ground floors to be thermally insulated to prevent heat loss which in turn improves the thermal efficiency of your property. This is likely to result in all external walls measuring 0.3m in width from the outer face to the internal space, it is important to account for this requirement to ensure that the available floor space of your alterations will still meet your needs.

Generally if you require help with your project you can contact a Building Control officer for advice, contact details are at the back of this document. Pre-application advice is available free of charge. In addition, full copies of the Building Regulations are available at www.planningportal.gov.uk or can be viewed at the main area based Building Control receptions - see page 14 of this document for details.

**What are the benefits of incorporating sustainable building measures?**

When you sell your property an energy performance certificate is produced to tell prospective buyers about the energy performance of your house. The more efficient your property the more attractive it will be to the potential purchaser.

When you sell your property an energy performance certificate is produced to tell prospective buyers about the energy performance of your house. The more efficient your property the more attractive it will be to the potential purchaser.

There are a number of ways in which you can increase the efficiency of your home whilst having a limited aesthetic impact. For example, increasing loft and wall insulation, using energy efficient lighting, central heating improvements, harvesting rain water through collection and re-use or composting kitchen waste. You may also wish to explore the use of solar panels, photovoltaic tiles or micro wind generators in your proposals. The image to the right shows examples of how these should and should not be incorporated into your scheme.

Contact your conservation officer for advice on sympathetic improvements to improve energy efficiency to historic buildings as they will be able to advise on would be appropriate and compatible with the buildings character, appearance, fabric and setting.
Key principles to follow relating to your householder proposal

For all proposals

- Use building materials and details typical of your area
- Retain the character of the area and immediate neighbourhood
- Make your proposal accessible to all by considering future users beyond yourself
- Use sustainable design and construction methods wherever possible, it is better for the environment and could save you money in the long term
- Do not incorporate boxy fascias unless they are a characteristic of your property. Fascias should sit flush with the external walls and roofs should not overhang

Side extensions

- Windows should line up with and follow the detail and proportions of those on the original house, particularly on elevations to be viewed by the public
- The extension should step back from the original dwelling’s front elevation, unless this is a logical way to visually join the extension
- With anything above a single storey extension the ridge line should usually step down from the original dwelling, unless this is a logical way to visually join the extension
- Distance between directly facing windows should be at least 21 metres if it will result in loss of privacy
- Windows serving social rooms should not overlook neighbouring private amenity space
- Existing amenity space should be retained relative to the needs of likely future occupants of the property (for example, a family sized dwelling should have family sized amenity space)

Rear extensions

- Windows should line up with and follow the detail and proportions of those on the original house, particularly on elevations to be viewed by the public
- Distance between directly facing windows should be at least 21 metres if it will result in loss of privacy
- Windows serving social rooms should not overlook neighbouring private amenity space
- Existing amenity space should be retained relative to the needs of likely future occupants of the property (for example, a family sized dwelling should have family sized amenity space)
Porches

- A porch should not conflict or compete with existing architectural features
- A porch should be modest in size, generally the smaller and more unobtrusive, the better.
- A porch should reflect the design and shape of the roof on the original house, avoid flat roofs unless you are replicating a genuine period detail.

Dormers

- Should be set in from the ridge, the eaves and the side of the property
- The window should line up with existing windows
- Flat roofed ‘box’ dormers look unattractive and should be avoided, the shape of the dormer should reflect the shape of the roof
- Distance between directly facing windows should be at least 21 metres if it will result in loss of privacy
- Windows serving social rooms should not overlook neighbouring private amenity space
- Use of materials should match the existing roof and use mitred slates with a traditional property
- Dormers should be considerably smaller in scale than the main roof. Smaller, separate dormers look better than a large one

Rooflights

- Use roof lights which match proportion of property as shown in the image
- Use the correct flashing for slate roofs so that the roof lights sit in the roof, not perched on the surface
- Restrict the size and number of roof lights on any visible roof
- Preferably locate roof lights to more hidden roof slopes

Windows, doors and joinery details

- Windows and doors should line up with and follow the detail and proportions of those on the original house particularly on elevations to be viewed by the public
- Choose a design appropriate to the original period of your house
- Avoid designs which are asymmetrical or contradicts the proportion or character of property, windows and doors should be well proportioned and detailed.
- Vertical emphasis helps to retain internal privacy
- Set windows back from the external walls by
at least 50mm. This creates a shadow line and a sense of solidity. Windows in slate hanging however, are generally flush with the façade

- Avoid the use of fake styles, they are never convincing
- PVCu should, as a general rule, not be used in older properties
- Means of escape windows should be provided to all first floor rooms and internal ground floor rooms. Windows should have an opening area of 0.33m² with a minimum dimension of 450mm. The base of the window should be between 800mm and 1100mm of the floor

Balconies

- Balconies are extremely hard to accommodate without adversely affecting the privacy of neighbouring properties
- Balconies are unlikely to be suitable on older properties
- Balconies should be designed to complement proportion and character of the property and should line with and follow the detail of windows on the original house
- Guarding to balconies should be unclimbable and 1.1 metres high

Garages

- Garages should be simple, functional buildings of moderate size and scale
- Garages should not compete with the main building in terms of footprint or height
- They should generally be single storey
- They should be simple in design, avoiding the use of domestic features such as the use of dormers
Outbuildings

- The size and scale of any outbuilding should not compete with the main building
- The size of the outbuilding should relate to its purpose
- Design and detail of outbuildings should complement the proportion and character of the property.

Property boundaries and entrances

- Ensure the proposal reflects the local character and does not urbanise rural areas
- Planting should be of local native species and not be ornamental in rural areas
- Consideration needs to be given to the highway verge outside the property which in rural areas needs to remain natural, avoid the unnecessary use of mounding, kerbing bollards and close cut grass
- Follow the vernacular construction styles that are typical to your locality, the images below are just examples – the method of laying and the colour of local stones varies throughout the County
If you need further help and advice

Please contact the office relevant to your enquiry:

**West Cornwall**

Dolcoath Avenue
Camborne  TR14 8SX
Email: planninghouseholder@cornwall.gov.uk

**Central**

39 Penwinnick Road
St Austell  PL25 5DR
Email: planninghouseholder@cornwall.gov.uk

**East Cornwall**

Chy Trevail
Bodmin  PL31 2FR
Email: planninghouseholder@cornwall.gov.uk

**Useful Links:**

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