

# Designing an Extension

## A Guide for Householders

DEVELOPMENT  
SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT



PLANNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
GUIDELINES No.5

## Introduction

If you are thinking about extending your home, it is important to be aware of the need to protect and enhance the appearance of your property. However, as well as providing the additional space you require it is also necessary to ensure that you do not upset the amenities of your neighbourhood. This guidance outlines important points to consider when proposing an extension in order to ensure you achieve these requirements.



## The Need for Planning Permission?

1.0 Before extending your home you need to consider whether or not you will need planning permission. A separate leaflet is available at Council Offices which explains what type of alterations need planning permission and this should be consulted at an early stage. However, all larger extensions will need permission and even small extensions may need permission in special cases or where the house has already been extended.

1.1 If you are intending to build an extension, you are advised to employ a competent architect or designer to prepare your plans in accordance with the guidance offered in this booklet.

1.2 The Borough embraces some specially protected areas including a large number of Conservation Areas and the area to the south of the M2, most of which is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In these areas, not only is it more likely that your extension will need planning permission because of tighter regulations, but the need for the highest standards of design is even more important than on properties in other areas.

1.3 These and other areas contain a great wealth of older listed buildings where especially stringent controls apply. Listed Building Consent will be required for any alterations, even if planning permission is not, and will certainly be required in addition to any necessary planning permission.

Separate additional guidance is available at Swale House and the Council has a Conservation Officer who will give detailed free advice.

### Before You Start

- *Consider the views of your neighbours.*
- *Think carefully about the appearance, scale & design.*
- *Do you need Planning Permission?*
- *Do you need Building Regulation Approval?*
- *Do you need Listed Building or Conservation Area Consent?*
- *Are there any covenants on your deeds that you need to consider?*

1.4 The Building Regulations apply where structural alterations are involved - this is almost always the case in constructing an extension or dormer window. The regulations are concerned with health and safety in buildings whereas planning legislation is mainly concerned with appearance, siting, layout and good neighbourly practice. You should contact the Council's Building Surveyor for your area at an early stage.

1.5 The planning officer for your area will be pleased to discuss your ideas with you, but it is always helpful to have sketches or even photographs with you when you call. Please telephone before you leave home to make sure that the right person is in the office to see you. Very often many of the potential pitfalls discussed below can be ironed out before you submit your planning application, saving you both time and money.

## The Effect on Neighbours

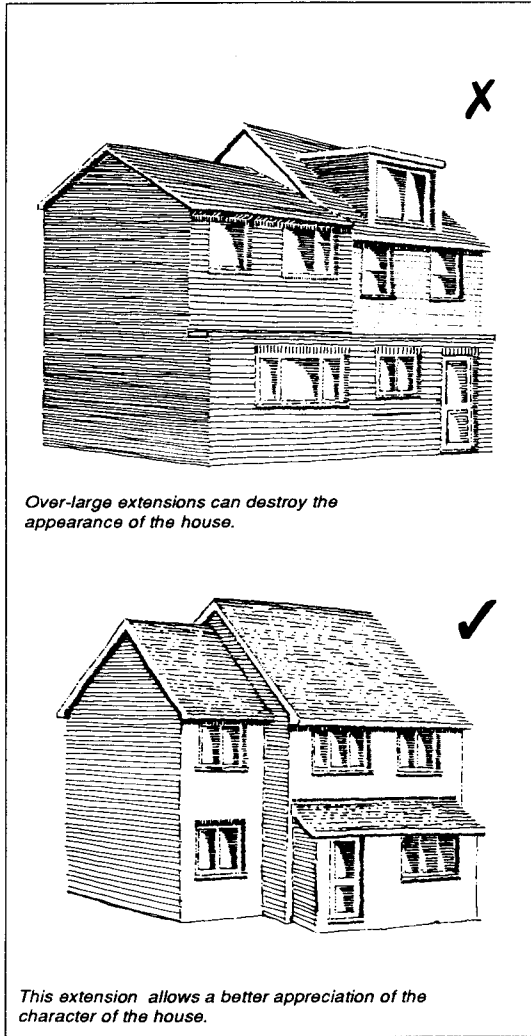
2.0 You should consider the amenities of your neighbours. Talk to them and consider their views before carrying out any extension or submitting your planning application. The Council will consult your neighbours when it receives your application. Prior discussion may enable your application to be dealt with more swiftly. A simple rule is to imagine that you are your own neighbour and ask yourself if you would like what you propose being built next door?

## The Appearance of the Extension

3.0 While you may be more concerned with how much extra space a new extension can provide, the Council is most concerned with the appearance of the extension in relation to the house itself and to the local area, and the effect it may have on your neighbours. Remember your extension may seem harmless by itself, but if copied elsewhere by others the result could be the erosion of the character of the entire neighbourhood. Extensions should respect or reflect the character and appearance of the existing building. A well thought out and integrated extension design is more likely to increase the value of your home. This guidance note is designed to help you avoid common problems with the appearance of extensions and point the way to acceptable schemes. The main considerations are amplified in the following pages.

**A. Scale**

3.1 Traditionally, extensions to buildings are smaller and less significant than the main building. Over-large extensions can destroy the appearance of the house and have a serious effect upon the area as a whole.



*Over-large extensions can destroy the appearance of the house.*

*This extension allows a better appreciation of the character of the house.*

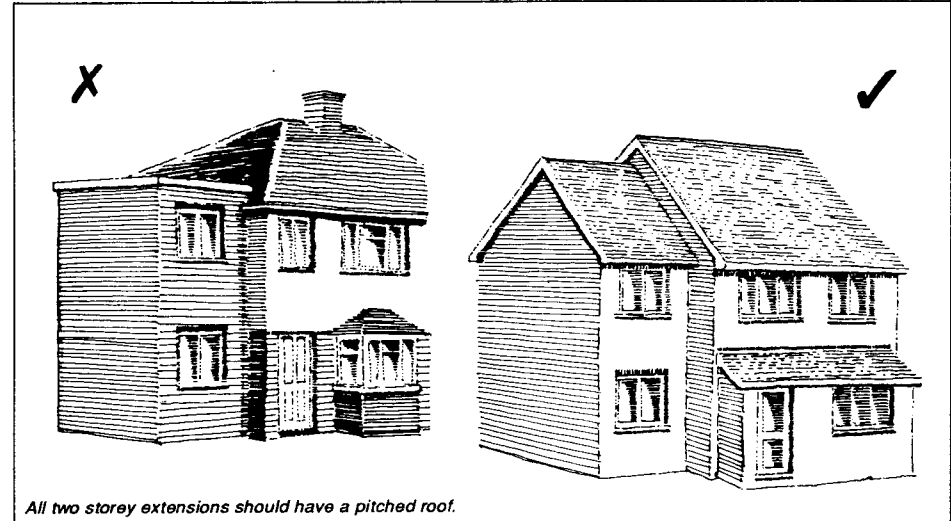
3.2 It is often advisable to set the extension back from the front wall of the existing house. This allows the joint between the new and old to be disguised and, especially on symmetrical single or pairs of traditional dwellings, preserves the original symmetry allowing better appreciation of the character of the house. The set back should be at least one or two brick lengths but often more and the roof above should be set back by the same amount to create the right impression.

3.3 In the countryside, scale is of particular importance. In rural areas, policies are designed to maintain their attractive character and the extension of a small cottage to create a large house will normally be resisted. The Council will not normally approve an extension to a dwelling in a rural area if it results in an increase of more than 60% of the

property's original floorspace. In many cases even extensions of this size are not acceptable. You should consult a planning officer prior to considering such an extension.

**B. Design**

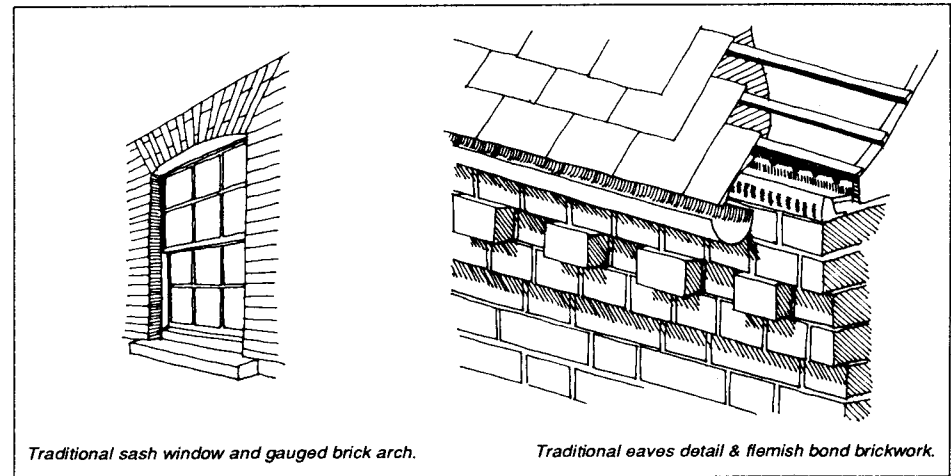
3.4 On houses with pitched roofs it is always best to have a matching pitched roof on the extension with the same type of tiles. All such two-storey extensions should have a pitched roof and front and other prominent single storey extensions are normally better for having pitched roofs.



*All two storey extensions should have a pitched roof.*

**The Importance of Details**

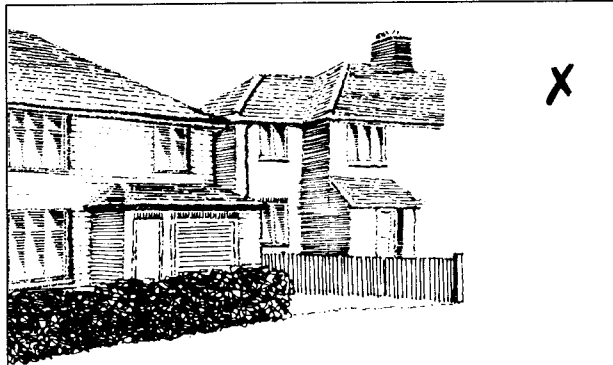
4.0 On any house, an extension should be well designed to reflect its character. Use of matching bricks, other facing materials, and roof tiles together with appropriate doors and windows is essential if an extension is not to upset the



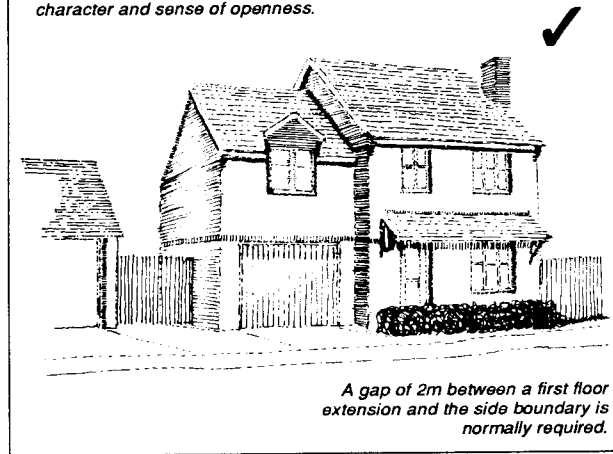
*Traditional sash window and gauged brick arch.*

*Traditional eaves detail & flemish bond brickwork.*

appearance of the house or the area as a whole. Such aspects are of particular importance in specially protected areas and on listed buildings.



Houses should not be physically or visually linked, especially at first floor level as the space between buildings is important in preserving the area's character and sense of openness.



A gap of 2m between a first floor extension and the side boundary is normally required.

4.1 Older properties often include features worthy of copying in extensions to them. Contrasting decorative brickwork, interesting eaves details, bargeboards, chimneys and varieties of brick bonding, should be repeated on extensions. This helps enhance the appearance of the extension and integrates it with the original house.

4.2 Doors and windows should respect those on the main building, and you should consider whether the existing doors and windows are original. If they are not, you may be able to use earlier designs of doors and windows, perhaps from nearby houses which have retained them. It is possible to have brick arches and

windows purpose made to match existing ones. If the main building has deeply set windows or a particular type of sill in wood or perhaps stone, try to copy the detail.

## Types of Extension

### A. Side Extensions

5.0 Where a two-storey side extension to a house is proposed in an area of mainly detached or semi-detached housing, the Council is anxious to see that the area should not become "terraced" in character, losing the sense of openness.

Residents of such a street have a right to expect that the character should be retained. Houses should not be physically or visually linked, especially at first floor level as the space between buildings is important in preserving the area's character and sense of openness. **A gap of 2m between a first floor extension and the side boundary is normally required.**

5.1 Setting the extension back from the front of the house does not normally overcome this problem and the fact that your neighbour does not wish to extend at the moment does not mean that he or a future occupant will not. Occasionally, a single storey side extension with a room in the roof space - providing two storey accommodation without losing the sense of openness between buildings, may be acceptable; such extensions should be discussed with a planning officer prior to submitting a planning application.

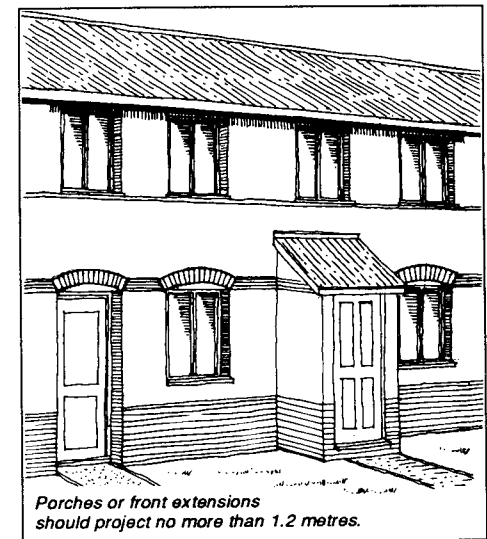
### B. Front Extensions & Porches

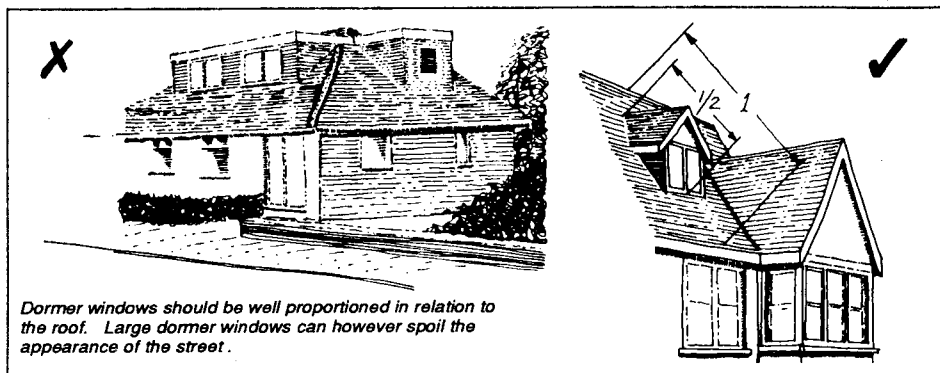
5.2 It is the extension to the front of your house that will normally have the greatest impact upon the appearance of the street. Any extension forward of the existing front wall is likely to pose difficulties. In conventional streets two-storey front extensions are rarely acceptable. Where there is a strong building line, extensions other than small porches are unlikely to be acceptable.

5.3 To make sure the extension to the front of your dwelling is of a good design, the Borough Council normally requires that it should have a pitched roof and that its projection should be kept to an absolute minimum. The Borough Council normally requires that front additions are kept to a maximum of 1.2m.

### C. Dormer Windows

5.4 All dormer windows in Conservation Areas and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty need planning permission and in other areas permission is needed if they face a road or public footpath. Building Regulation Approval will also be required. Loft conversions involving dormer windows can have a serious impact upon the character of a street. One large dormer window in a terraced street can affect the appearance of the entire street. Similarly, if they hide the entire roof slope they can give the appearance of a flat roofed house.



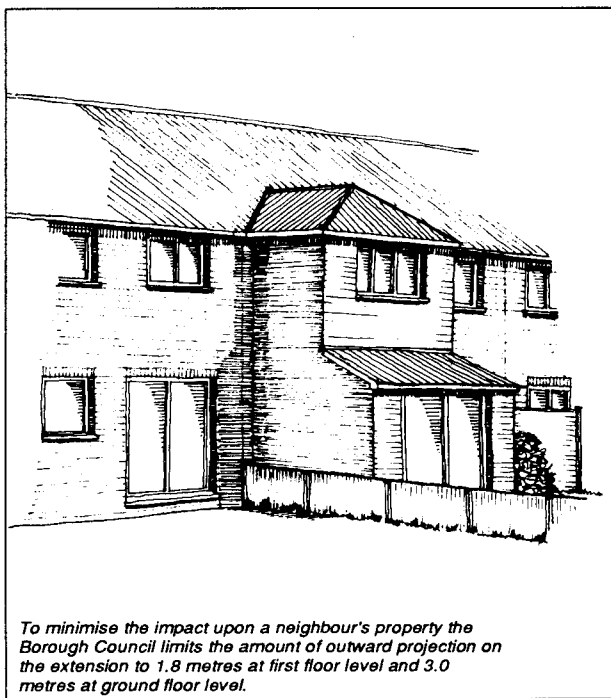


Dormer windows should be well proportioned in relation to the roof. Large dormer windows can however spoil the appearance of the street.

5.5 Dormers should be in proportion with the roof and only as large as necessary to allow light into the roof space. As a guide the dormer should be no deeper than half the depth of the roof slope and have square proportions or a vertical emphasis. They should normally have pitched roofs with tiles to match the main roof. Suitably designed dormer windows are preferred to rooflights in Conservation Areas and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In general, a number of smaller dormers is preferable to one large one and dormers that are higher than the ridge of the roof are almost never acceptable.

**D. Rear Extensions**

5.6 If not sensibly planned, rear extensions can have a considerable impact upon your neighbour. Careful regard should be given to the outlook of your neighbours and the effect of the extension on sunlight and daylight to their dwelling. This is particularly important where the extension is along a common boundary and especially on terraced or semi-detached properties. To minimise this impact, the Borough Council limits the amount of outward projection on the extension.



To minimise the impact upon a neighbour's property the Borough Council limits the amount of outward projection on the extension to 1.8 metres at first floor level and 3.0 metres at ground floor level.

5.7 For single storey rear extensions close to your neighbour's common boundary, the Borough Council considers that a maximum projection of 3.0m will be allowed. A first floor extension should not exceed 1.8m (with two storey rear extensions the potential impact can be even greater). Leaving a gap to the boundary with your neighbour may offset this requirement slightly depending on the distance allowed.

5.8 If your neighbour's house projects rearward of yours or already has an extension on the back, then the Borough Council may allow a rear extension to the distance of the adjacent property or extension provided the extension remains in scale and character with your property. However, if your house is set back from your neighbour's, your ability to extend to the rear will be limited.

5.9 On well spaced detached properties or where an extension is to be built away from the boundary a larger extension may be acceptable.

**Other Issues**

**A. Windows**

6.0 Side windows should be avoided to reduce overlooking and mutual loss of privacy, although high level windows (with an internal sill height of at least 1.65m) may be acceptable. Obscured glazing to toilet, bathroom and landing windows would overcome the problem. Windows to other ground floor rooms may be accepted if at least 2.4m from the side boundary and a screen fence or wall may be required to protect neighbours' privacy.

6.1 Windows to the rear should be at least 21m from the windows of other houses to the rear. Extensions which reduce such a distance will need to be carefully examined. It should be noted that the option of a high level window or high level rooflight as the only light and ventilation to a habitable room to overcome these problems is not normally accepted by the Council.

**B. Car Parking**

7.0 The effect on available off-road car parking space is also a matter of concern to the Council. Where car parking is or could be provided in the grounds of the property the Council will try to ensure that a new extension does not take this away without a suitable alternative area being made available. The Council will seek to ensure that at least one retained space is suitable for the building of a garage if one does not already exist. Extensions or conversion of garages to extra accommodation, which reduce available parking space and increase parking on

roads are not likely to be accepted. Nor is the provision of all car parking in the front garden a suitable alternative as the position is unlikely to be suitable for a garage and will create a poor appearance in the streetscene.

7.1 The addition of an extra bedroom may require extra car parking space to be provided so that additional cars from a larger family now or in the future can park off the road.

### **C. Balconies**

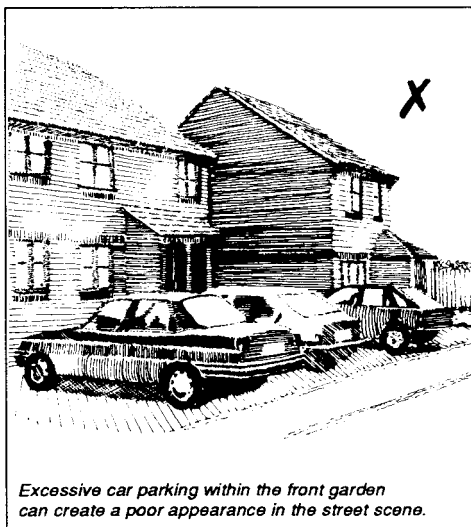
8.0 When considering applications for flat roofed extensions, the roof will not normally be allowed to be used as a balcony due to the resultant privacy problems for neighbours which can so often occur. The Council will seek to ensure that no doorway opens onto such a roof and may impose a condition preventing use of such an area as a balcony. Only in exceptional circumstances will a balcony arrangement be approved.

### **D. Landscaping**

9.0 Care should be taken to avoid the need to remove trees and hedges to make way for an extension. Trees are legally protected against damage in Conservation Areas and some are specially protected by Tree Preservation Orders. Existing vegetation should be retained where possible and new plants and shrubs, especially climbing plants, can help to integrate the extension into the setting.

### **E. Other Legislation**

10.0 It should be noted that the granting of a planning permission does not convey permission to carry out works which may be the subject of approval by other legislation such as the Building Regulations or the need to seek permission to obstruct or divert a public footpath.



**For further planning advice please contact:**

Planning Services, Swale house, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT; ( advice is also available on the planning pages of website at [www.swale.gov.uk](http://www.swale.gov.uk) )

Email us on [planning@swale.gov.uk](mailto:planning@swale.gov.uk) or Fax us on 01795 417417

**The Duty officer is: available:**

8.45 to 5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 8.45 am to 4.30 pm on Friday.

Contactable either in person at Swale House or by telephoning **01795 417442** and can

- Give advice on procedures and processes
- Answer general questions and Comment on development potential
- Give general advice on who to contact and how best to seek pre-application advice.

Swale's Conservation Officer - telephone 01795 417375

**For Building Regulation advice please contact:**

South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership,  
Compass Centre, Chatham Maritime, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4YH

Telephone 01634 331133

Fax 01634 331299

Email [building@stqbc.org.uk](mailto:building@stqbc.org.uk)

If you would like further information, more copies or alternative versions (i.e large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact:

**Customer Services**

Phone: **01795 417850**

Email: [csc@swale.gov.uk](mailto:csc@swale.gov.uk)



This booklet is one of a number of planning and development guidelines published by the Development Services Department of Swale Borough Council. Others include:

1. *The Conversion of Buildings into Flats and Houses in Multiple Occupation.*
2. *Listed Buildings - A Guide for Owners and Occupiers.*
3. *The Conservation of Traditional Farm Buildings.*
4. *The Design of Shopfronts, Signs and Advertisements.*
5. ● *Designing an Extension - A Guide for Householders.*
6. *Planting on New Developments - A Guide for Developers.*
7. *The Erection of Stables and Keeping of Horses.*
8. *Conservation Areas.*

Others may be published from time to time. Should you wish to obtain any of the above then please contact:

Swale Borough Council. Development Services Department,  
Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne,  
Kent. ME10 3HT. ☎ (0795) 417344.