
Directorate of Environment and Regeneration • Planning Services

LOCAL PLANNING GUIDANCE NOTE NO.1 EXTENSIONS AND ALTERATIONS TO DWELLINGS

Background

Extensions and improvements are a reasonable way of achieving more space and functionality within a dwelling, but where planning permission is required it may not always be granted. Whether in the open countryside or in a built-up area, **proposed extensions should respect their local surroundings** in terms of size, scale, aspect, design and materials. This Note is concerned with the external appearance of the dwelling, including its scale and mass. Although the planning system does not have the right to protect the views from householders' properties, it should prevent detrimental impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties and on the character of the property and its surroundings. In this sense, the planning system operates to reconcile the needs of individuals with the wider community interest.

It is recommended that a suitably-qualified professional is used to prepare the proposals. Many mistakes have been made in the past where people have settled for solutions such as flat roofs because they appear cheap in the short term. **Good design** need not be more expensive; indeed, it can add value to the property and result in lower maintenance costs. Examples include designing in energy efficiency and designing to prevent (or reduce) crime. Whether or not planning permission is needed, this Guidance Note should help to bring about high quality development which will enhance the property and its neighbourhood.

At a general level the Welsh Assembly Government publication "**Planning: A Guide for Householders**" offers useful advice. It is freely available from Planning Services, County Hall, Mold. Certain minor changes – called "**permitted development rights**" – may be made without the need for planning permission, and these are explained in the booklet.

A cautionary note: planning permission should only be applied for once the scheme has been finalised. Any changes desired after permission has been granted will require a fresh planning application.

Policy

The Welsh Assembly Government now takes a firmer view on design matters, as explained in their **Technical Advice Note 12 Design**, which is quoted in our "General Information Note" in this series.

At the local level, of greatest relevance to this topic is **Policy HSG12 (House Extensions and Alterations)** of the UDP, which states:

"Extensions or alterations to existing dwellings will be permitted provided that the proposal

- a. is subsidiary in scale and form to the existing dwelling, and does not represent an overdevelopment of the site;
- b. respects the design and setting of the existing dwelling and surrounding area; and
- c. will not have an unacceptable impact on people living nearby."

The supporting text notes that "As a general guide, house extensions should not be more than 50% of the original floorspace and extensions that are out of scale and character will not be permitted." For clarification, "original floorspace" means that of the original dwelling rather than the existing dwelling, thereby aiming to prevent several extensions over time which, cumulatively, would become overlarge.

Policy HSG 13 (Annex Accommodation) is relevant to proposals for accommodation for dependent relatives (sometimes known colloquially as "granny flats"):

"Annex accommodation will only be permitted where:

- a. it is created by an extension to an existing dwelling;
- b. or, is a conversion of an existing building within the curtilage of a dwelling; and
- c. its usage is ancillary to the residential use of the existing dwelling."

Account must also be taken of **Policy D3 (Building Design)**:

"Development will be permitted only where:

- a. the proposed building and structures are of a high standard of design, form, scale and materials; and
- b. it protects the character and amenity of the locality and adds to the quality and distinctiveness of the local area.

Applicants must include a short written explanation with their planning application illustrating the design principles adopted prior to the drawing up of their proposal. This will illustrate how the proposal will fit within the existing surroundings and improve the speed of the decision making process."

Neighbours

In the interests of good neighbour relations, it is advisable for any householder intending to extend their property to inform, and discuss their intentions with, their neighbours who will be affected by the development. On all planning applications the Council will undertake **consultations with neighbours** likely to be affected by the proposal.

It is the responsibility of the householder, applicant or agent making the proposals to ensure that any extension, solid wall or means of enclosure is constructed on land under the same ownership and to **avoid encroachment** of foundations or overhanging of guttering. Details of the Party Wall, etc. Act 1996 are available at the Planning Services office.

Additional special considerations

Whilst the same general principles apply across the County, special considerations apply to dwellings which are:

- **Listed buildings** (see LPG Note 6)
- In a **conservation area** (see LPG Note 7)
- In the **Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

In conservation areas and the AONB permitted development rights are more restricted, which means that it is necessary to apply for planning permission for certain types of work which do not need an application in other areas; for instance, the volume limits for extensions are lower, and permission is required to clad the outside of the house.

Any alterations or extensions which affect the character or appearance of a listed building will require **listed building consent** as well as planning permission.

In all these sensitive areas, the Council will be looking for the highest design standards. It is recommended that advice on such issues is sought at an early stage from the Development Control section in the Planning Services office at County Hall, Mold, by contacting the Planning Support Officers on 01352 703234.

Costs of the project

This is obviously a matter for the applicants, and it is not a planning issue, therefore these comments are offered as advice. It is wise to be realistic about what can be afforded, and to beware of stretching the available funds too far. Better to put the major effort into the basic structure, because a skimmed structure will be expensive and difficult to put right afterwards, whereas finishes and furnishings are cheaper and easier to improve later as more funds become available. From the planning viewpoint, clearly the external appearance must be acceptable in terms of the principles contained in this Note.

Advice on extensions and alterations

The advice on extensions which follows is looked at firstly from the viewpoint of **general design principles** and secondly with regard to **particular forms of extensions**, for example rear extensions.

General principles

To summarise, in altering a dwelling, several principles should be kept in mind:

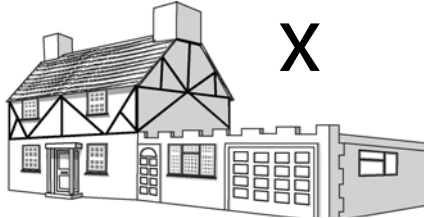
- Avoid over-enlargement or drastic changes in character. (See Figure 1)
- Keep and develop the building's good points whilst correcting its shortcomings by sympathetic modification.
- Avoid the inappropriate, such as pseudo-historic details mimicking past styles not authentic to the building, and avoid also pseudo-foreign details intended for another climate and conditions. (See Fig.1)
- Avoid unnecessary alteration of the building's basic structure and avoid large structural works, unless these are repairs.
- Respect the building's site and surroundings.

These principles are now examined in greater detail in terms of scale and form.

Fig 1 Good and bad ways of extending a traditional house



A typical local rural house before extension. The three examples all alter the house to give increased light to the front rooms, weather protection to the front door, and reroofing and extend it with a garage; two unsympathetically and suitably.



With pseudo-historic details, totally unauthentic



Modernised, yet neither truly old nor truly modern

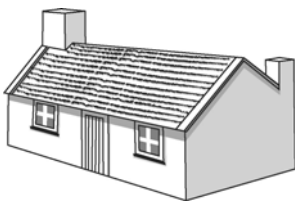


Sympathetically done in relation to the building's original character

Scale and form

The extended building should not become over-assertive or obtrusive, nor should it harm good public views into or out of the settlement, which may be of greater concern in small villages and hamlets. **Any new extension should be subsidiary or subordinate** in terms of overall floor area, size, height and proportion to that of the original dwelling. With regard to the 50% figure quoted earlier, it is difficult to give a precise percentage which would always be appropriate but any extension which came close to doubling the floorspace, for example, would be unlikely to appear subsidiary and therefore unlikely to receive approval. This should be borne in mind when thinking of buying a property. Choosing a building that needs only modest expansion will avoid many of the problems that are caused by attempting to add an overlarge extension. The aim should be to **ensure that the extension harmonises with and complements the existing dwelling**, rather than simply being added on to it. Fig. 2 illustrates these points. But it must also avoid over-dominating smaller adjoining properties, in other words it should fit with its surroundings.

Fig 2 Extending in scale



The original small cottage



Extension in scale



Extended beyond recognition and totally unacceptable

Good design principles when considering extensions include:

- **Continuation** – where the extension continues the building line and roof of the original dwelling. This suits a relatively small extension. Windows, doors and materials should match the original.
- **Reflection** - by using the same form as the original but at a smaller scale or set back in terms of building line, or with a lower roofline.
- **Separation** – where the original house has special features or a distinctive character which it would be difficult to emulate by either of the two previous methods, the extension could be linked by a porch, hallway or gallery.

The extension should not result in an overdevelopment of the residential curtilage. LPG Note 2 (**Space Around Dwellings**) gives the Council’s minimum standards for garden areas, parking spaces, site boundaries, distances between properties with overlooking windows, and distances to plot boundaries from the building. Extensions should not result in the loss of existing parking spaces where to do so would cause road safety or congestion problems. Furthermore, extensions should not lead to the loss of large areas of garden which could then lead to future applications for garden extensions, particularly in rural settlements or in the open countryside.

LPG Note 4 covers “**Trees and Development**”, and aims to retain trees wherever possible and to avoid encroachment upon trees, which may still be growing.

Materials

The external walls and the roof of the extension should normally be **sympathetic** to those on the original building in terms of the type, texture and colour of materials used, as should the **pointing** of brickwork and stonework. Should the building have been altered inappropriately in the past, it may on occasions be better to seek to relate the extension to nearby buildings which have better retained the vernacular, that is, the indigenous local style. Sustainability issues should be borne in mind, such as trying to use local materials (brick, stone or timber, as appropriate) and by using energy efficient materials and features.

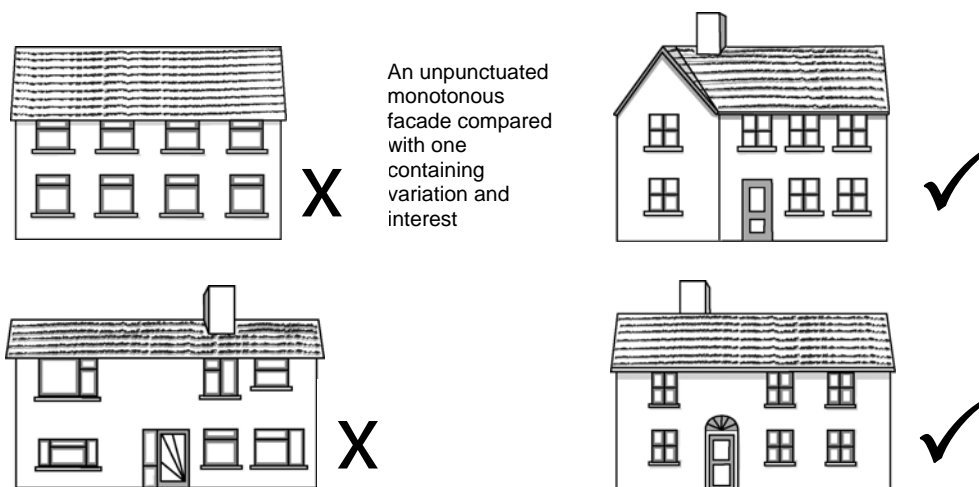
Design

In order to produce a visually suitable design, account should be taken of the following considerations:

- **Punctuation** – the giving of greater or lesser emphasis to different parts of a design to avoid monotony and incoherence.
- **Balance** – the placing of the parts of a design to give a settled composure rather than a restless, unsettled appearance; try to ensure that the extended building does not look awkward or unbalanced.
- **Resolution** – the giving of major emphasis to one important element of the composition, to give a focus and avoid the confusion of different parts competing for attention in an unbalanced jumble of unrelated parts.

The focal point should be clear, and from there the other elements of the design should be placed, proportioned and detailed so as to allow the eye to “read” the whole design in an orderly way. These principles are explained better by illustrations than words. Fig. 3 shows these considerations in both good and bad terms.

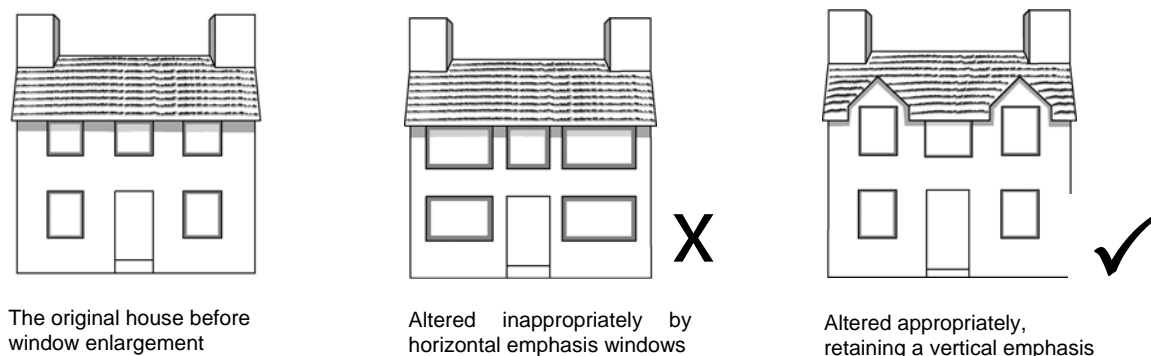
Fig 3 Punctuation, balance and resolution



The restless, unsettling, jumbled form altered to a balanced composition which does not have to be symmetrical to work
Both good examples introduce a focus whereas in the others the parts compete for attention

In **altering a traditional house or cottage**, care should be taken to respect its scale and character. Enlarging openings and raising door, window or ceiling heights can easily destroy this scale and character unless sensitively handled, therefore as a rule such change should be kept to a minimum. The proportion of solid (wall, roof) to void (windows, doors) should be carefully considered, as illustrated in Fig 4. In traditional buildings solid areas dominated voids, whereas in modern buildings the reverse is often the case. Traditional buildings should retain this characteristic.

Fig 4 Proportions



These principles apply just as much to more modern houses as indicated by the example of a 1930's semi-detached in Fig. 5.

Fig 5 Good and bad ways of extending a typical 1930's semi-detached



The left keeps the character of the original and its features such as tile hanging and brick detailing.
The right introduces a flat-roofed extension, spoils the proportions, and loses original detailing

The **design of the roof, wall and window detailing should be in harmony with the architectural balance of the existing dwelling**, provided that the existing building has not previously been inappropriately altered. They should not adversely affect the immediate surroundings, be they landscape or townscape. It may be possible to enhance without slavishly copying the original.

The size, type, material, finish and design of **windows** on an extension should be related to those on the existing house. It would be wrong to introduce a horizontal emphasis, for instance, where the present windows have – as is usual in older houses – a vertical emphasis. Timber casements or sash windows may set the pattern. The position of windows relative to neighbouring properties is covered in LPG Note 2, with the aim of minimising overlooking. Where walls of extensions are close to a boundary, windows at first floor level should be omitted or have obscured, non-opening glazing, but this should not be used in what are classed as habitable rooms.

When an extension is reasonably prominent **pitched roofs are the best solution**, but there may be less visible situations at the rear of properties in which a flat roof is acceptable. The roof extension, pitched or flat, should not

be higher than that of the existing dwelling, and its pitch, angles and materials should match those of the existing structure.

Details of ridges, eaves, gutters and downpipes should be shown on the drawings. In conservation areas and on listed buildings, materials used (e.g. cast iron) will be a significant consideration.

Walls, railings and gates of merit should be taken into account, with good examples being retained.

Particular forms of extensions

Front extensions

Normally these should not project forward of the existing building but in certain situations, where to do so would reflect an existing feature of the locality, they may be acceptable. Also, where the existing building is set well back and the front extension reflects the design of the existing and does not cause detriment to the neighbouring dwellings it may be satisfactory to allow a sizeable front extension. The 45° guide, described under rear extensions, may be applicable. Care should be taken not to reduce car parking below the required level, as set in LPG Note 11 Parking Standards.

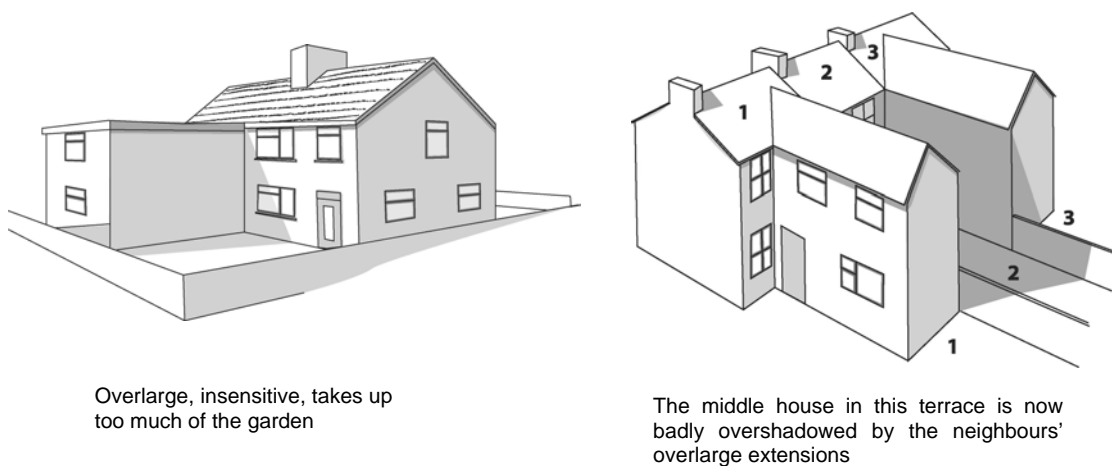
Side extensions

Flat roofed extensions, which do not fit with the present building, are not generally acceptable. A side extension should not fill in the gap between residential properties so as to create the impression of a terrace in a line of detached or semi-detached houses, but setting back the extension by a metre or two could maintain a visual break. Corner plots, prominent from two streets, may warrant additional criteria in which the width of the extension should not exceed half the width of the existing frontage of the property, nor should it exceed half the width of the garden/plot between the property and the adjacent highway.

Rear extensions

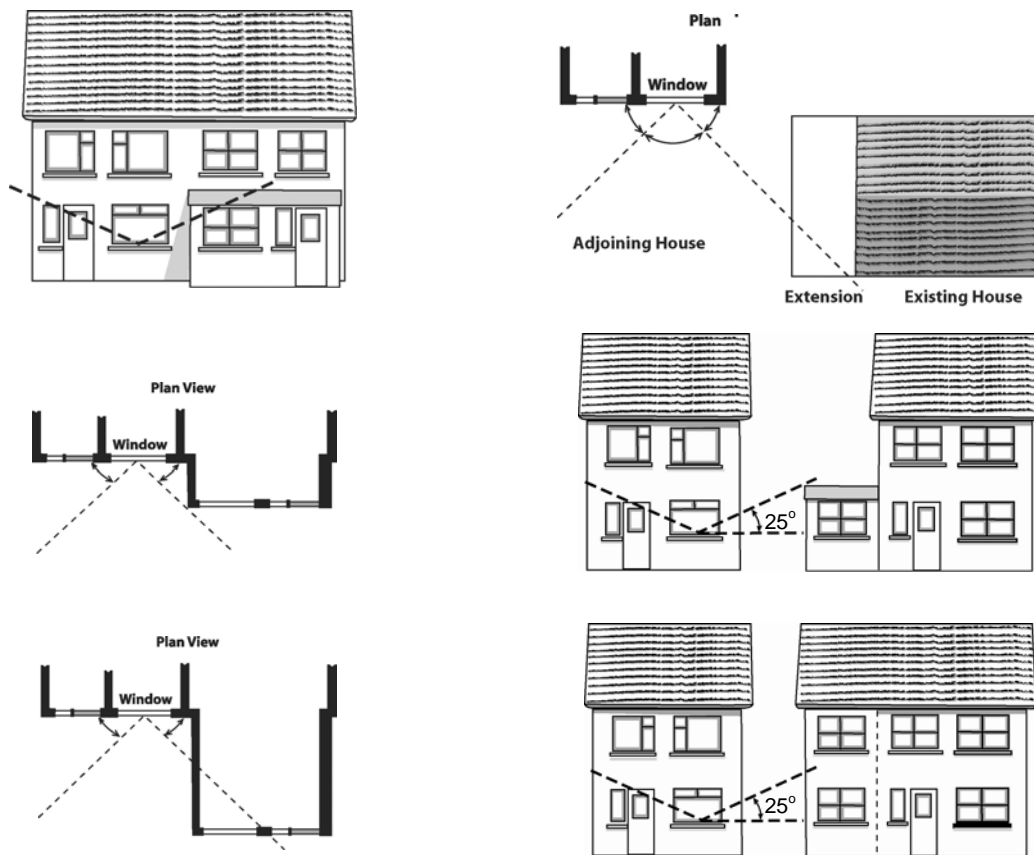
As always, care should be taken to **avoid adversely affecting the amenities of neighbours**, as explained in LPG Note 2. Figure 6 shows examples of how not to do it.

Fig 6 Unacceptable rear extensions



The Council uses as a guide **the 45° code**, explained in Figure 7. In summary, a 45° line is drawn from the midpoint of a sill of a window in a habitable room in an adjacent house. If the proposed extension would go beyond that line it would probably result in an unacceptable loss of light. (But this requirement would normally exclude windows on side/gable elevations, otherwise spaces between dwellings fronting a highway would have to be widened to an unacceptable level.) The impact of the height of an extension can be assessed by drawing a line upwards at an angle of 25°. For a bungalow the extension should not be higher.

Fig 7 The 45° guide



Taken from images produced by Denbighshire County Council

Two storey extensions should not normally be within 2 metres of a boundary that forms a party wall between terraced and semi-detached properties, and 1 metre of other properties. (Occasionally the only way properties can be extended is by building at the side up to the boundary, but this must be visually relieved by setting back the façade and/or lowering the ridge height.)

Attic and roof extensions

If the roofspace has sufficient height to allow for standing then light may be obtained by means of rooflights, but otherwise the only physically practical answer may be to use sizeable dormer windows, which may well be unacceptable to the Council because they almost inevitably affect the character of the building and area for the worse. Where small gables are a local feature they may provide an acceptable design solution. Roof alterations and dormer windows should normally be kept as small as possible, and should not project above the ridge line of the property. Sloping rooflights are cheaper to install than dormer windows and less intrusive, and are also likely to avoid or reduce overlooking. If the attic or loft conversion is to be used as a habitable room (e.g. a bedroom), the stair access should not be from an existing habitable room.

Annexes and dependent relatives' accommodation ("granny flats")

A residential annex is **accommodation ancillary to the main dwelling within the residential curtilage** and must be used for this purpose. It is acknowledged that an extension of the house or conversion of an outbuilding may provide an opportunity to accommodate elderly or sick relatives, or older teenagers, in the curtilage of the main dwelling whilst giving them some degree of independence. However, the annex (or "granny flat") should form part of the same "**planning unit**" (by sharing the same access, parking area and garden) because the Council will wish to avoid the annex becoming a self contained dwelling and the creation of two separate dwellings, and it will attach conditions to prevent this occurring. (If the applicants' wish is to separate off part of their curtilage to form a new planning unit then there may be an acceptable way of doing so in built-up areas, and this should be discussed with Planning Services staff, but not in the open countryside where new dwellings are not normally allowed.) The **layout, design and physical relationship between the house and the proposed annex** will be important considerations for the Council in deciding such planning applications, as will the size and scale of the accommodation to be provided. It is unlikely that a large annex would receive permission. As a guide, the scale should be such that the annex could be used as apart of the main dwelling once the dependency need has ceased.