

# GRAND DESIGNS



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# Planning law explained

Getting permission needn't be scary – this is what you need to do

## How do I apply?

In England and Wales, you need to apply for householder planning consent – you can do this online at [planningportal.gov.uk](http://planningportal.gov.uk), or through your local planning authority. Applications cost £172 in England and £166 in Wales. You will need to include supporting documents, such as plans, for your application to be considered.

## What if my building is listed or in a conservation area?

You need to apply for separate consent, which can be done concurrently with your planning application, at no extra cost. Bear in mind when applying that if your extension is in a conservation area, and visible from public land, it should not compromise the character of the location.

## Can I get pre-application advice?

Yes. Local planning authorities offer this service (some charge a fee), which is useful both for confirming what you need to submit and for flagging up any potential issues. Be prepared to describe your proposals and show your plans.

## What happens next?

Planners will publicise and consult on your proposal, including notifying your neighbours (so it's a good idea to speak to them before you submit your application). Anybody can make comments, which planners will assess and may then suggest minor amendments.

## How long does a decision take?

Planners have eight weeks to make a decision, and can request additional information during this period – however, you or they can apply for more time.

## Who decides?

Usually a senior planning officer, but for more controversial applications they may defer to a committee made up of elected councillors. Your application will either be granted, granted with conditions, or refused.

## Can I appeal?

Yes, though this can be a lengthy process. Resubmitting an amended application might be quicker and more fruitful.

## What about Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate planning systems; visit [eplanning.scotland.gov.uk](http://eplanning.scotland.gov.uk) and [planningni.gov.uk](http://planningni.gov.uk) for information.

## PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT

Some extensions can be built without planning permission, under what's called permitted development. This only applies to houses – not flats or maisonettes – and the rules differ for designated areas (such as conservation areas). Always check with your local authority first, and get a Lawful Development Certificate to confirm your work is allowed. And remember, you will still need building regulations approval for any work you do. Visit [planningportal.gov.uk/permission](http://planningportal.gov.uk/permission) for details of permitted development in England and Wales, as well as interactive guides. For Scotland and Northern Ireland, visit [eplanning.scotland.gov.uk](http://eplanning.scotland.gov.uk) or [planningni.gov.uk](http://planningni.gov.uk).

## THE MAIN STIPULATIONS

**Maximum footprint** for extensions and outbuildings is half the land around your original house as it stood in July 1948.

**Maximum length** for rear single-height extensions is 3m from the back of an attached house, and 4m for a detached house. The Government is proposing to double this for a period, but has not passed this as law yet. For two-storey extensions, the maximum length is 3m.

**Maximum height** for an extension is 4m, or 3m if it's within 2m of your boundary.

**Side extensions** cannot exceed half the width of your existing house.

**Roof extensions** cannot add more than 40cubic metres of space to a terraced house, or 50cubic metres to a detached or semi-detached house. This includes any additions that previous owners may have made.

**Materials** for the new structure must be similar to your existing house.

**Basements** are usually permitted if you are converting an existing cellar or basement, rather than excavating a new one, as long as it isn't going to be used for self-contained accommodation and doesn't alter your home's exterior appearance.

**Outbuildings** are usually permitted, depending on size and location, as long as you are not creating self-contained accommodation.



this picture Paul McAneary Architects (020 7240 0500; [paulmcaneary.com](http://paulmcaneary.com)) fought a tough battle for permission for this contemporary extension in a conservation area in London



this picture Detached garden rooms, like this design by Roman Pardon Architecture & Design (07793 676 481; [romanpardon.com](http://romanpardon.com)), usually fall under permitted development



## QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Trudi Elliott, chief executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute, offers advice for a smooth planning process

### Is a pre-application discussion useful?

'Getting advice from the decision makers before submission is always helpful. You may think your design is simple, but the local planning authority could identify issues you didn't spot. For more straightforward extensions, a quick call to ascertain the basic rules may be sufficient.'

### How much should you prepare for this?

'The more information you provide, the more precise the advice will be. You get out what you put in. Check with the local planning authority on their processes and charges, if any, for pre-application advice. This will outline the minimum information and detail expected.'

### What about talking to neighbours?

'Discussing your plans and listening to concerns could save time in the long run, though it might be worth doing this after discussing what is acceptable with your local planning authority. If someone objects, that doesn't necessarily mean your proposal is unacceptable. Likewise, if your neighbours support you, that doesn't mean the council will allow your design.'

### Is it important to look at previous planning applications on the site before submitting?

'Yes, as it will show what has been approved or refused – though what was acceptable 20 years ago may not be now. This information will be on record at your local planning authority, and can be accessed through a planning history search.'

### How can hold-ups be avoided?

'Make sure your application complies with your local planning authority's policies. Councils have had to make substantial cuts, so some no longer allow amendments, and will refuse applications if they are not acceptable. Also, it doesn't hurt to be proactive and check with them every couple of weeks to see if there are any issues or further information that is required.'

### When is a planning consultant useful?

'A consultant can prepare an application, advise on policy and design, and help with appeals, particularly for challenging projects – but may not be necessary for a straightforward design. Look for a consultant who's a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute. They will have MRTPI after their name – a mark of professionalism.'

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