

DESIGN GUIDANCE FOR HOUSE EXTENSIONS

INTRODUCTION

Good design is desirable both for its own sake and to enhance our physical environment. Poor or mediocre design is often a reason for public opposition to new buildings. This advice note is intended to assist in achieving well designed house extensions. It is not intended to be comprehensive nor should it stifle imaginative architectural designs where these accord with the Council's overall policy on house extensions.

This note gives guidance on four main aspects.

1. Neighbourliness
2. Respecting the character of the property
3. Respecting the character of the locality
4. Particular types of extension.

NEIGHBOURLINESS

Before submitting an application it is worth talking first to your neighbours. They may have suggestions that could be incorporated in the design. It is also best that they hear of the proposal first from you rather than when the Council notifies them of the proposal. Any views they express to the Council will be taken into account in assessing the application.

Neighbours in turn have to recognise the Government's advice that the basic question for the planning authority is not whether they would experience financial or other loss from a potential development. Rather it is whether the proposal would unacceptably affect amenities which ought to be protected in the public interest. Good neighbourliness is one of the yardsticks against which development proposals can be measured. This includes privacy, sunlight and daylight, and outlook.

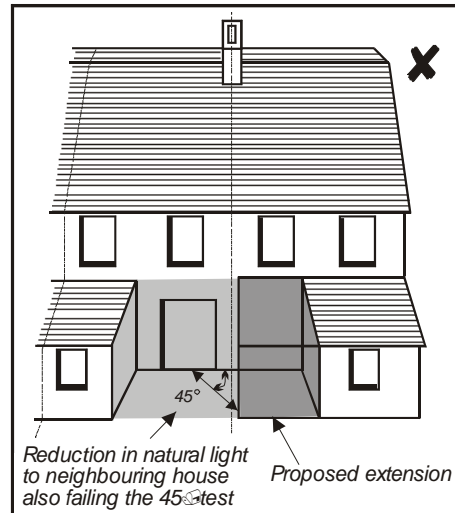
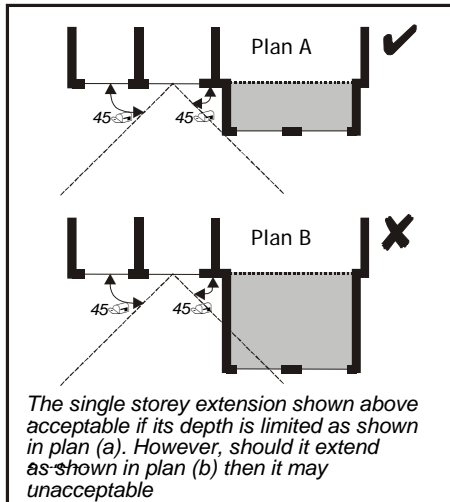
A neighbour's permission is required if foundations encroach or if an extension overhangs or attaches to their property. Their consent will also be needed if access to their property is necessary during construction, or for subsequent maintenance.

Daylighting

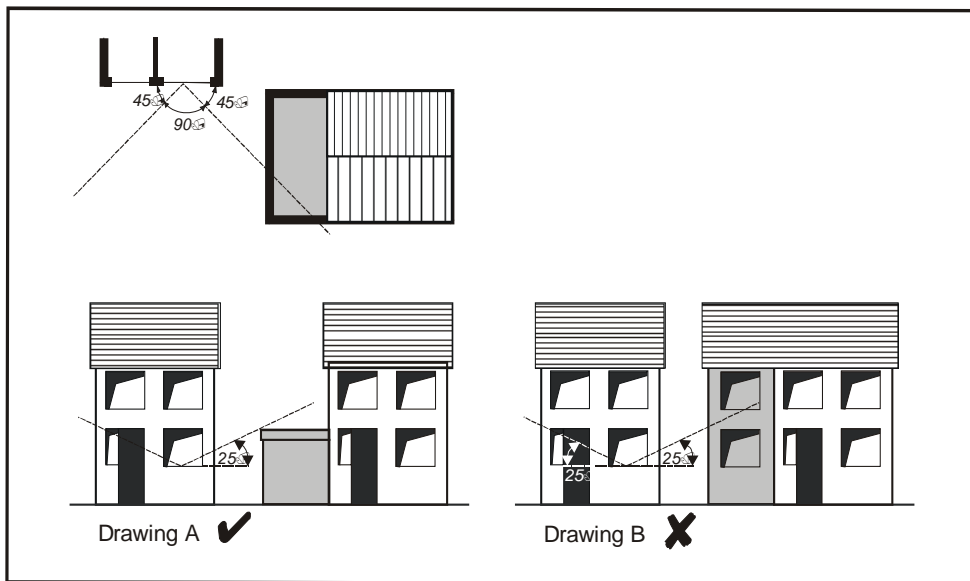
The extension should not cause any significant loss of daylight or sunlight to living rooms, dining areas, studies or bedrooms in neighbouring properties nor unreasonably reduce sunlight to neighbouring gardens to a substantial degree. Aspect is an important consideration. For instance, an adjacent property is more likely to suffer a reduction in sunlight if the extension is on its southern side.

In assessing the likely impact of an extension to a dwelling on an adjacent property two guidelines are generally employed.

The illustration over the page shows the use of a 45° plane plotted from an adjacent property's window or patio door at ground floor level. If the extension extends beyond the 45° plane (plan B) then this suggests that the passage of light to the neighbouring property's habitable rooms might be significantly affected. This is only a general rule, and factors such as the nature of the room affected, (a ground floor living room being more sensitive than a bathroom), the aspect of the room affected, the size of the window relative to ground levels and whether there are any further and larger unaffected windows lighting the same room, will also be taken into account.



If an extension fails the above test it may be acceptable when a second guideline is applied based upon the Building Research Establishment's good practice guide. This involves considering the 3-D effects of the proposal in more detail. Under this guideline the 90° angle created by the two 45° planes diverging from a ground floor level window are rotated 25° from the horizontal. Any obstructions above the 25° rising plane would be likely to significantly reduce daylight to the neighbouring property's habitable rooms (see illustration below)



The extension shown above encroaches across the 45° line. However, if the extension is single storey only (drawing A) it does not cut across the 25° rising plane and is therefore acceptable, if a flat roof is visually also acceptable in this location. If the proposal is a two storey extension (drawing B) then it breaks the 25° rising plane and is unacceptable. The 25° angle is measured from cill level or the centre point of patio doors.

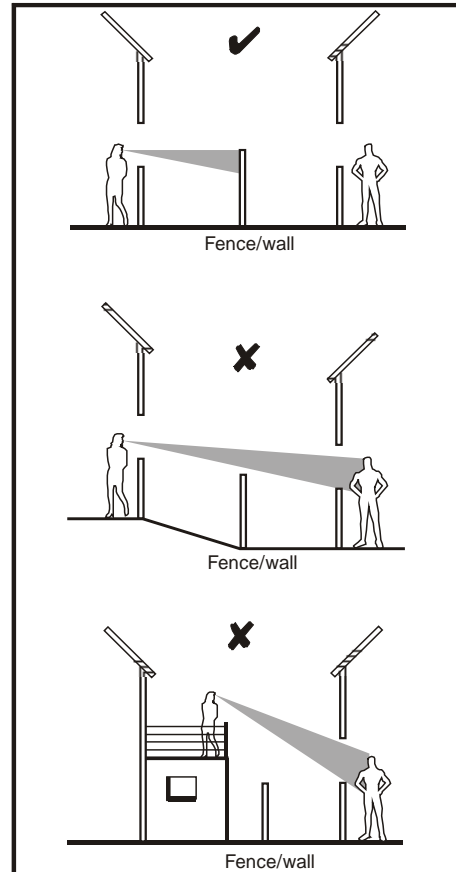
This guidance may also be used to assess the impact of extensions on side windows where they are the main means of lighting a habitable room. In doing so, account will be taken of the impact of existing buildings.

Privacy

An extension should not result in any substantial loss of privacy to adjoining dwellings and gardens. To prevent overlooking, side windows above ground floor level or others with views over boundary fences or hedges directly into neighbouring houses should be avoided. However obscure glazed windows to bathrooms or high level windows (i.e. internal cill of 1.7m/5'6") to other rooms may be acceptable in such situations.

It needs to be remembered that under the Building Regulations there may be a requirement for a minimum size of window. If this then gives rise to significant overlooking it will not be acceptable on planning grounds.

A ground floor level side window may be acceptable where a fence or other boundary screen would stand between it, and the neighbouring property. Much will depend upon the height of the fence and the respective ground floor levels of the properties concerned (see illustration).



Outlook

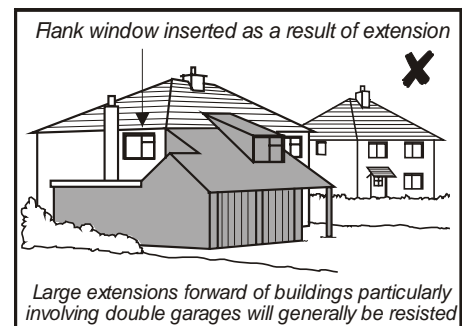
The effect of an extension on someone's view (particularly more distant views) will not normally be a significant fact in the consideration of a planning application. However, an extension should not appear unduly prominent from the neighbour's property. Much will depend upon the individual circumstances and the degree of harm caused. Meeting the 45° "rule of thumb" described previously is usually likely to avoid problems of poor neighbouring outlook.

RESPECTING THE CHARACTER OF THE PROPERTY

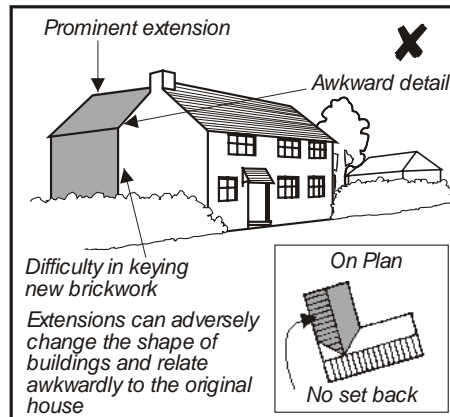
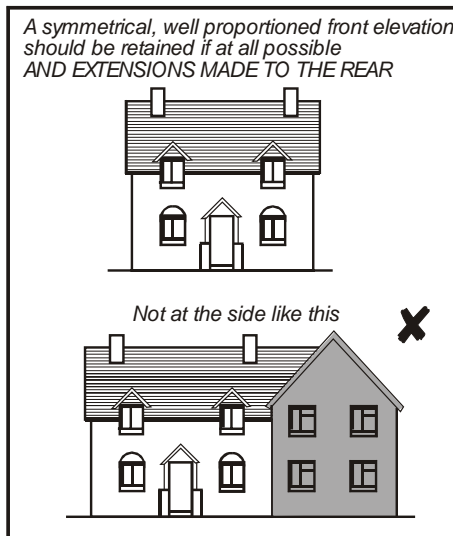
Shape and Form of Extension

The size of the extension should not be excessive in relation to the existing house. Consequently it may be necessary to reduce its scale. Alternatively breaking up a large extension into a series of smaller parts may reduce its impact.

In the countryside extensions are further restricted and are not permitted if they are disproportionate to the original dwelling (please enquire further of the Council's Planning Department).



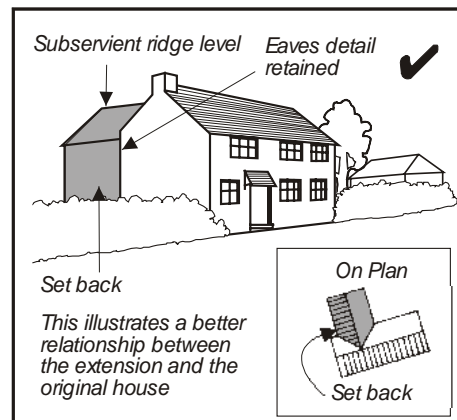
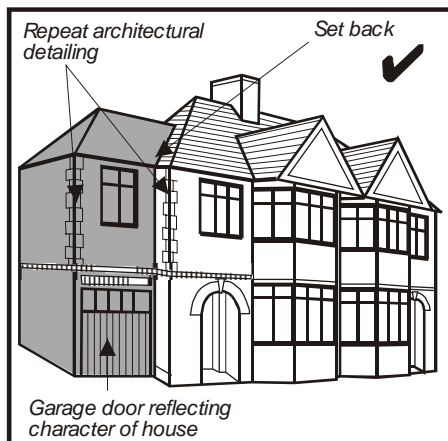
Extensions which detract from the overall shape and style of the original building will not normally be acceptable.



There are essentially 2 methods of handling the form of extensions so that they harmonise with the original appearance of the house:

METHOD 1:

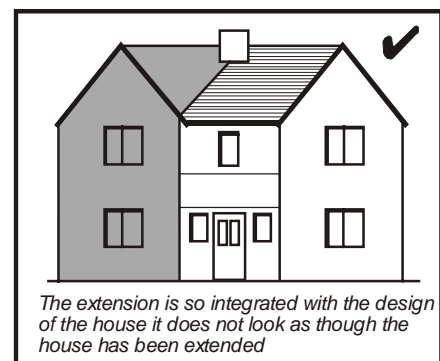
By making the extension subordinate to the house thereby minimising its impact and enabling the form of the original house to be appreciated. This approach is appropriate for a house which is part of a larger symmetrical building such as a semi detached pair and where the original form of the building should not be altered. (See illustration). It involves setting the extension back (at least 0.5 metre, but often more) and creating a lower ridge to the roof.



METHOD 2:

By designing the extension so that it is not readily recognisable as an extension. This is usually only acceptable where it does not affect symmetry. Therefore it tends to be more successful with detached and individually designed houses. (See illustration).

The first method is usually easier to achieve satisfactorily. The second method can in some cases be totally inappropriate especially where the extension spoils the original proportions or symmetry of the building or where it sits awkwardly with houses which were originally of similar design.

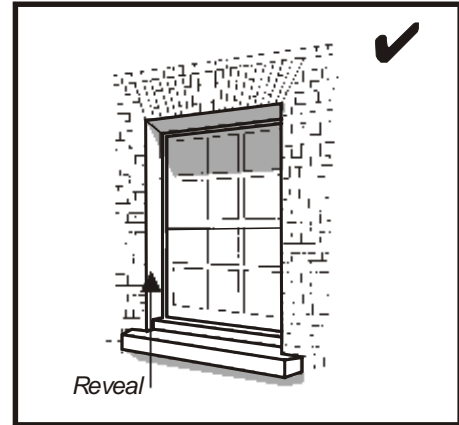


Sympathetic Design

Extensions may look out of place because they do not incorporate the design features of the original house. These can be the proportions and design of the windows or the omission of decorative brickwork or barge board design which are characteristic of the house. Attention to these details is often the key to the successful integration of a design for a new extension.

The proportions, size and design of new windows should generally echo those of the main house. Avoid flimsy or unsympathetic window frames, and make sure that the new window has the same "reveal" as other windows in the house. The reveal around a window is the distance the window frame is set back from the face of the wall. It adds definition and depth to a facade and provides some weather protection.

Often it will be desirable for windows to be positioned to align with the pattern of the existing house and conform to the original symmetry. The exception will be some period houses where the irregular positioning of windows may be part of their charm.



Matching Materials

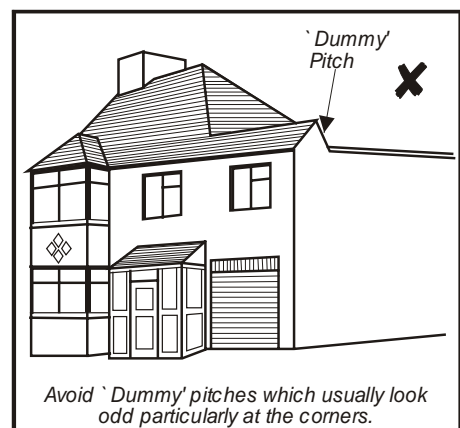
The choice of suitable external building materials is very important. Introducing new materials that are unrelated to those on the existing house should be avoided. Extensions should be constructed in the same materials as originally used, if they are still available, or the closest possible match. Brick merchants will normally be able to advise you.

Care should be taken to match as far as possible original mortar colour, pointing and bonding of the bricks and tiles used in the existing house. Natural materials such as clay tiles, slates and stock bricks are generally regarded as essential in Conservation Areas in order to maintain their character and quality.

Roofs

The choice of roof is most important because it will determine the overall shape of the extension and the contribution it makes to the character of the house.

All two storey extensions should have pitched roofs to match the existing house. Two storey flat roofs will not normally be acceptable especially where they may be seen by the general public. Similarly, single storey extensions which are visible from a public area should normally have pitched roofs. Single storey extensions with flat roofs can detract from the character of the property and may suffer from long term maintenance problems. They may be acceptable if located on the rear of houses where they are not publicly seen and where the scale of the extension needs to be kept to the minimum, but they are not encouraged.



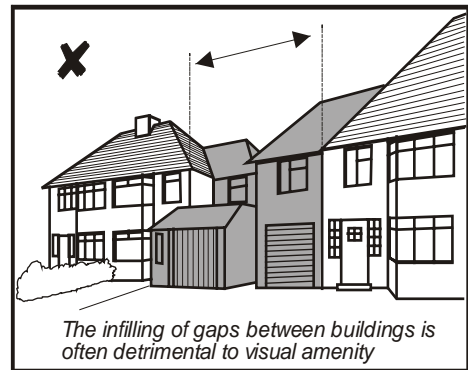
Dummy pitched roofs which take the form of a tiled upstand along the front wall of an extension should be avoided. This artificial decoration is rarely successful especially when the outer corner is visible.

New roof ridges should not exceed the height of the original and normally should be lower. It is generally advisable to copy the shape and angles of the existing roof. Consequently, if the existing roof is hipped, so also should that of the extension. The eaves of two storey extensions should normally line up with those of the existing house, and the pitch should also be the same.

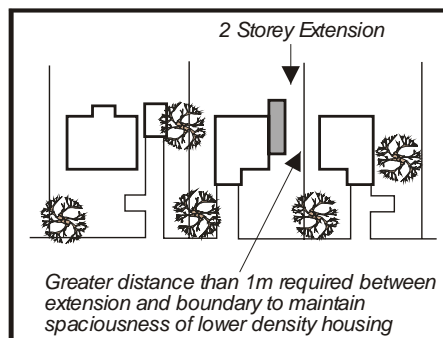
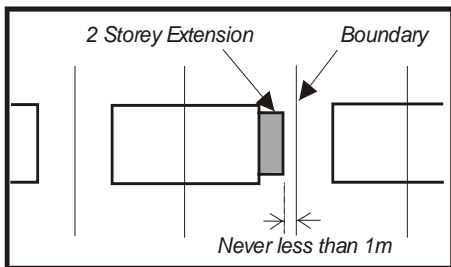
The colour and shape of new tiles and slates on pitched roofs should match those of the existing building. This is essential where the new roof connects directly to the existing. In such cases it may be possible to reuse some tiles from where the roof connection is made on the front of the extension.

RESPECTING THE CHARACTER OF THE LOCALITY

The infilling of gaps between houses can, if repeated, cause a terracing effect which is likely to harm the character of a street. It is therefore essential to retain sufficient space around two storey side extensions which are visible from the street. The distance will depend upon the density and spacing of houses in the street or locality. Therefore, while two storey extensions should normally be at least 1 metre away from a side boundary, this distance will often need to be greater, sometimes substantially greater.



Parts of Mole Valley are characterised by large detached properties in wide plots and proposed extensions will be expected to maintain a level of spacing that is consistent with the overall character of the area. As a general rule, the larger the house, the greater the space around it will be needed. (See the following illustrations)



Some recently built housing estates have been developed at their outset to the maximum potential. The scope to assimilate extensions is therefore limited if the character and openness of the estate is to be kept. Furthermore, conditions are often imposed on planning permissions for developments such as these to remove the "permitted development rights" which otherwise would exist. This enables the Council to consider proposed extensions individually in these tight situations. If you live on a modern estate of this type check with the Council at an early stage.

PARTICULAR TYPES OF EXTENSION

Conservatories

Conservatories can offer a relatively inexpensive and flexible way of increasing accommodation. They are becoming a significant feature in residential areas. A well designed conservatory can add interest to a house. However, the appearance of numerous conservatories of mixed designs and colours in publicly prominent positions can spoil the overall character of a residential area. The Council will consider such proposals on their merits having regard to the number and location of conservatories already erected.

Conservatories to older properties of character should be constructed principally of wood and painted white.

Porches and Entrances

The first impression of a property is often set by its entrance. The aim should be to make the porch or entrance relate to the character of the house. This is achieved by ensuring that its style, proportions and materials match those of the house. Ready made porches may be cheaper but they may not suit the style of a particular house.

Whilst owners may like to give the house greater identity, the addition or the style of a porch in a terrace can look out of



place and spoil the overall appearance of the terrace. (See illustration)

Historically, the design of porches was usually in keeping with the character of the house and the high standard of joinery and workmanship achieved gave a sense of quality to the entrance. Conversely, today's mass produced period style porches and doors are usually poor imitations and can look out of place in both modern houses or houses not of that period. A freshly painted original door is likely to be a better alternative than a stained, mass produced hardwood replacement.

Loft Conversions and Roof Extensions

Loft conversions are a popular method of creating extra space and can be achieved through relatively minor alterations. Sometime they will not require planning permission. However, if the house has already been extended and dormer windows are proposed or restrictive planning conditions apply to the property, permission may be required. Dormer windows on the front of the house will also need permission. It is advisable to check first with the Council's Planning Department.

Some buildings do not lend themselves to any form of roof extension as it would spoil their character. If the roof slope is too shallow for the rooms it may not be possible to accommodate an extension without creating unsightly, large, flat roofed, box like dormers.

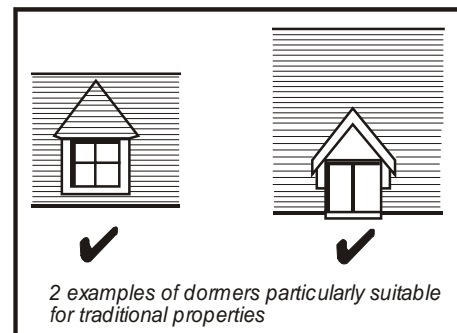
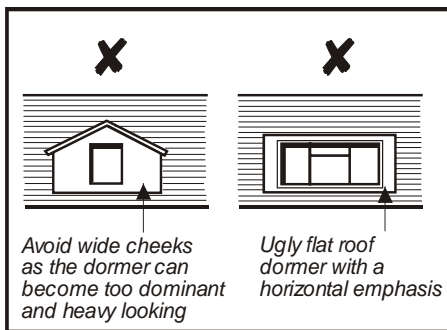
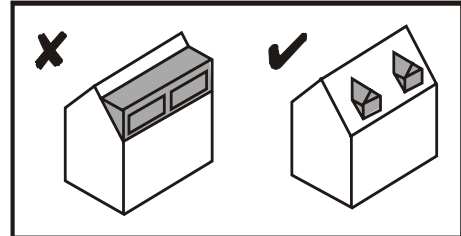
The roof to any dwelling is an important feature of the building and therefore interruptions to it should be kept to a minimum. In practice there are two alternative ways of giving light and ventilation to rooms in the roof, dormer windows or roof lights.

Dormer Windows

A successful roof extension depends on achieving a combination of form, materials, window design and detailing which is sympathetic to the character of the existing building. It should be clearly subsidiary to the original building. In order to reduce its public prominence, positions on the front of the house should be avoided.

Large single flat roofed dormers tend to create ugly box like features which dominate the roof slope. Depending upon the style of the house the Council will usually resist these where permission is required.

It is better to construct two dormer windows that are small, vertically proportioned and have pitched roofs. They should not have wide cheeks as this spoils their proportions. The aim should be to retain the maximum area of uninterrupted roof slope. The construction of too many dormers is likely to undermine the character of the original house.

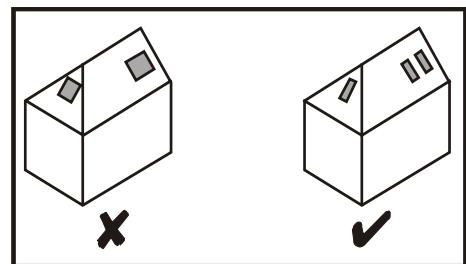


Dormer roof extensions which extend above the existing ridge height or wrap around the existing hips of roofs can be particularly unattractive and should be avoided.

Similarly, they should not be sited to the side of a roof slope where it would overlook a neighbouring property or upset the symmetry of the building.

Rooflights

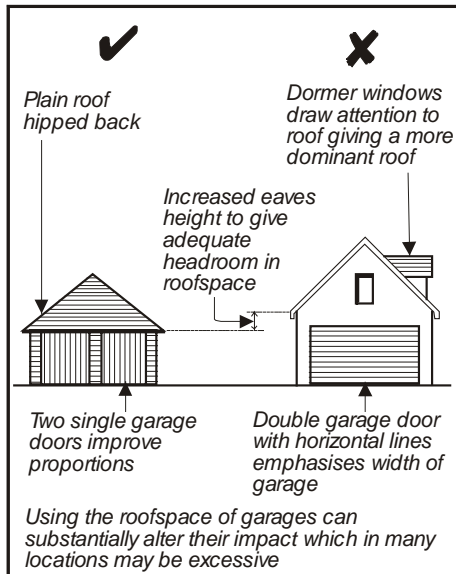
Caution should be exercised before inserting rooflights. The large square models can be ugly and may not reflect the proportions of windows in the rest of the house. The narrower and more vertically proportioned rooflights are preferable as are those set flush into the plane of the roof and which do not protrude above it. This is particularly important in the case of historic buildings or in Conservation Areas.



Garages

A garage, like other extensions, is usually better set back from the face of the existing house. It is a utility structure which should not dominate the appearance of the house. A freestanding garage should be designed in sympathy with the house, be built of similar materials and have a similar roof pitch. It should not generally be in the front garden as it could be given undue prominence at the expense of the character and setting of the house. Particularly in rural areas or close to

neighbouring property, the roofs to double garages should be pitched back on all four sides. This will help to minimise their impact. Rooms above garages increase their bulk and prominence and are generally discouraged. In some rural locations it may be worth considering an open fronted substantially constructed car port under a traditional pitched roof as an alternative to a garage.



The design of the garage door will influence the overall appearance of the garage and should relate to the character of the house. Timber rather than metal doors will be preferred for traditional properties particularly in rural areas. Sometimes the proportions may relate better to the existing property if two single garage doors separated by a brick pillar are provided instead of wider double garage doors. Vertical as opposed to horizontal boarding to the doors may also be more suitable.

A garage at the side of property should normally be set back from the front wall of the house unless it incorporates a porch all under a pitched roof in an integrated design.

Proposals to convert a garage to living accommodation, possibly in conjunction with extensions, will be expected to include provision for replacement garaging or show how it can be satisfactorily achieved within the curtilage. Even where the property owner does not require garaging it is likely to be needed by a future owner. This needs to be assessed at the outset. Proposals which are likely to result in replacing front gardens largely by hard surfaces for parked vehicles will be resisted where permission is required. Smaller front gardens occupied by parked vehicles are normally damaging to the character of residential streets and especially to Conservation Areas.

