

# **Good Design – House Extensions**

Adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance

Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft

December 2004



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## Terms used in this document

**Amenity** Residential amenity is the pleasantness of living conditions in terms of levels of daylight, sunlight, privacy, outlook and freedom from unreasonable noise and disturbance. See page 13.

**Daylight and sunlight** Both are often referred to as ‘natural light.’ Daylight is the natural light available from the sky. Daylight is available from all directions, including north, even when clouds hide the sun. Direct sunlight is available from the southern sky, from the east through to the west. Blocking out daylight or sunlight can darken properties. See page 13.

**Habitable room** Rooms in which people are likely to spend a considerable amount of time – i.e. not landings, hallways, toilets.

**Setback** The distance by which an extension is set back from the property line or main house. See page 10.

**Outlook** ‘Outlook’ is what you can see at close range from your property. The planning system cannot be used to protect vistas, but residents are entitled to be protected from the oppressive effect of buildings of overbearing appearance. See page 17.

**Overshadowing** Blocking sunlight casts shadows, which can darken rooms and gardens. See page 13

**Overlooking** To overlook something is to view it from above. A window or garden that is overlooked lacks privacy. See page 15

## **This Guide**

This guide supplements Policy H16 of the Swindon Borough Local Plan, 2011, which states:

**Proposals for residential extensions shall only be permitted where:**

**a) there is no material detraction from a neighbour's enjoyment of light or privacy, and**

**b) there is no harm to the character and appearance of the house or its surroundings.**

Around 60% of the applications for planning permission received each year by Swindon Borough Council are for house extensions. This guide aims to promote high standards in the design of house extensions and deals with all types, including conservatories and porches, and freestanding ancillary buildings such as garages.

This guide sets out four principles, aimed at preventing unacceptable harm to the appearance of houses and areas, or to the safety and pleasantness of people's living conditions. [See page 6].

Supplementary planning guidance ('SPG') such as this does not form part of the Local Plan. However, in deciding planning applications, SPG may be taken into account as a material consideration.

## Good Design

The Government’s policy for design in the planning system is contained in its *Planning Policy Guidance 1 (General Policies and Principles)* which advises “Good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process and should be encouraged everywhere. Good design can help promote sustainable development; improve the quality of the existing environment; attract business and investment; and reinforce civic pride and a sense of place. It can help to secure continued public acceptance of necessary new development.”<sup>1</sup>

“Local planning authorities should reject poor designs, particularly where their decisions are supported by clear plan policies or supplementary design guidance which has been subjected to public consultation and adopted by the local planning authority. Poor designs may include those inappropriate to their context, for example those clearly out of scale or incompatible with their surroundings.”<sup>2</sup>

Design quality is not something that easily lends itself to rules. Engaging the services of an architect or skilled and experienced designer can increase the likelihood of obtaining planning permission with the least difficulty or delay. A well-designed extension can increase the value of a property, but a poorly designed addition to a house could have the opposite effect.

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<sup>1</sup> PPG1. Paragraph 15.

<sup>2</sup> PPG1. Paragraph 1.7

## **Four Principles**

Design of a house extension

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**An extension should not harm the character or  
appearance of a house or its surroundings**

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**An extension should not cause unreasonable harm to  
the living conditions of neighbouring residents**

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**An extension should not lead to inadequate provision  
for car-parking or cause road-safety problems**

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**An extension should not result in a home having too  
little private outdoor space**

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Swindon Borough Council will grant planning permission  
for extensions that conform to these four principles

## **An extension should not harm the character or appearance of a house or its surroundings**

### **General**

The most important influence on the design of a residential extension should be the character of its surroundings and the form of the house to which it is to be attached<sup>3</sup>. Even extensions that would not be in prominent public view should be designed to harmonise with their surroundings.

An extension should normally look 'in character' with the house. It should appear to naturally 'belong'. In fact, the most satisfactory form of extension often looks as though it had been planned as part of the original house.

An extension should normally appear as a subordinate addition to the original dwelling - not as a dominant element of the resulting building.



Side extensions in harmony with the original house.

In deciding whether to grant planning permission for a house extension, its position; size; shape and proportions; architectural design and materials will be considered.

### **Position**

The position of an extension (front, side or rear) is a prime consideration when assessing the effect it might have. A large rear extension could affect a neighbour's outlook or privacy. A front or side extension could affect the character and appearance of the street.

Extensions at or near property boundaries have the greatest potential to cause problems for

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<sup>3</sup> Special considerations apply to historic 'listed' buildings and other buildings of significant local interest. Also to the effect on any 'conservation area'. See page 25.

neighbours' outlook, privacy and natural light – and may give rise to problems of access.

### **Rear extension**

For rear extensions, the most important planning consideration is likely to be the effect on neighbours' natural light and privacy.



A two-storey rear extension could cause problems of overshadowing or loss of privacy, in some cases.

However, appearance also needs to be considered because some rear extensions may be clearly visible from nearby properties and public places.

Rear extensions will result in loss of garden space.

### **Front extension**

Most front extensions (and many side extensions) are likely to be in full public view and to affect the appearance of public streets. Some locations, such as corner sites, are more prominent than others.

The most important consideration for a front extension, therefore, is likely to be its effect on the character and appearance of the house and its surroundings.

Most houses have been designed with a harmonious façade, which could be unbalanced by a front extension.



Three houses with a common frontage. A front extension to one of these could spoil their unified character and appearance.

Similarly, a group of houses facing a street, or around a close, often have a unified appearance. An alteration to the front of one house could create a discordant element in the overall street scene.

For these reasons, large front extensions are rarely appropriate.

### **Side extension**

Side extensions are also often in full public view, and affect the appearance of their surroundings. They are sometimes entirely new additions, and sometimes built as extra space above an existing single-storey extension or a garage.



Side extension above existing garage.

Gaps between buildings, and views through them, give a spacious character and appearance to a street or area. Filling in these gaps can affect the character of areas and reduce their attractiveness.

Even in areas where the density of housing is relatively high, there can be feeling of openness (as at Coleview, in east Swindon) because of the spaces between buildings – particularly above ground-floor level, or because of the small size of the dwellings.

Large side extensions should not result in a row of detached or semi-detached properties taking on the character of terraced housing, with too little space between buildings.

It is also desirable to avoid the visual imbalance that can result where a large side extension is planned, especially for one of a pair of otherwise symmetrical and matching semi-detached houses.



Semi-detached properties such as this would look unbalanced if a large side extension were added to one side.

Where the filling of gaps between buildings is acceptable, setting back the front of a side-extension from the front of the house can help to allow the original form of the building to remain apparent to the eye, and to ensure that the extension appears subordinate to the original house. [The roof of the extension should be lower than the main roof].



The front wall of this side extension is well set back from the front wall of the original dwelling.

Normally, the Council will accept a setback of 1 metre or more [on plan] as being sufficient. However, there will be cases where even a larger setback will not be enough to prevent an unacceptable effect on the area's character and appearance. And in some cases, a setback may actually be less appropriate than extending 'in-line'.

If an extension is built close to a boundary, access to your neighbour's property may be needed to build the extension and to maintain it in the future. This may not be acceptable to your neighbour and, without your neighbour's consent, you may be unable to build the extension, even if planning permission is granted.

When a house is extended right up to the side boundary, the convenience of a way through to the back garden, without going through the house, may be lost.

## Size

The larger the extension, the greater will be its visual impact on its surroundings, and its potential effect on neighbours' natural light and outlook.

Extensions should appear as a subordinate addition to the original dwelling and should be of a size that is appropriate to the original house and to the locality.



Side extension in scale with its surroundings.

As a general rule, extensions should not add more than 20% of the original floor space. In some cases, even a smaller percentage increase will have an unacceptable impact.

In the case of adjacent houses, two-storey extensions at or near site boundaries are usually undesirable, except where adjoining properties have the same form of extension. Such extensions will almost always cause serious loss of natural light to neighbouring

property's windows [even where that property lies to the south and would not lose direct sunlight] and would have an overbearing appearance when viewed from next-door.

Single-storey extensions at or near site boundaries should not normally be longer than 3 metres, measured from the original house. Rear two-storey extensions should not normally extend more than 2 metres from the original house, and in many cases should be shorter than this.

### **Shape and proportions**

The best looking extensions have a simple shape. Unusual plan shapes lead to complicated roof constructions that can often look out of place [and be expensive to build].

The shape of its roof will largely set the overall shape of an extension.

Flat-roofed extensions are usually unacceptable for two-storey extensions, for visual reasons. As a general rule, the Council will seek to achieve pitched roofs to two-storey residential extensions

For single-storey extensions, however, there may be cases where a flat roof will be desirable, in

order to reduce its bulk – for example, where appearance is relatively unimportant, but where overshadowing or neighbour's outlook are significant issues.



The ridgeline of this side extension is lower than the main house but the eaves line remains at same level.

For single-storey extensions, gabled, 'cat slide' or mono-pitched roofs are options that can be used to blend in the new structure with the existing building.

The eaves line of the extension should either be the same as the main house, or at a much lower level altogether.

The ridgeline of an extension's roof should normally be lower than that of the main house.

### **Architectural design and materials**

For an extension, building materials and details such as doors and windows should be in harmony with the original house and surroundings.



The window of this extension matches those of the original house.

Building materials should usually match those of the house, in type, colour and texture. The best solution may be to use the same materials that were used to build the original house, if this is possible.

Window and door patterns should match those of the existing building. Vertical alignment of openings looks better than misalignment.

For most houses, windows with a vertical emphasis tend to look more pleasing than windows with a horizontal emphasis.

## **An extension should not lead to unreasonable harm to the living conditions of neighbouring residents**

People spend more time in their home than anywhere else and pleasant living conditions are very desirable. The Council must consider whether a proposed building would unacceptably affect amenities that, in the public interest, ought to be protected.

Good neighbourliness and fairness are among the yardsticks against which proposals can be measured.<sup>4</sup>

When considering a house extension, therefore, the Council pays attention to the effect it may have on the living conditions, or 'amenities', of residents of nearby dwellings.

The main concerns are:

- daylight, sunlight and overshadowing;
- privacy and overlooking;
- outlook;
- noise and disturbance.

In some cases an extension may actually harm the living conditions

of the home that is itself being extended, by blocking out daylight or reducing garden size, for example.



Houses on different levels can cause unexpected problems of overlooking or overshadowing.

Adjacent houses are sometimes on different levels. This can mean that a two-storey extension may effectively appear as a three-storey (or even taller) building when viewed from a neighbouring property at the lower level. This effect should be borne in mind when considering neighbours' amenity.

### **Daylight, sunlight and overshadowing**

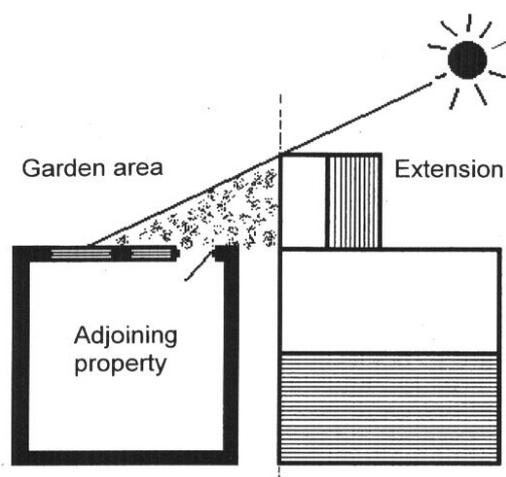
Daylight is the natural light available from the sky. Daylight is available from all directions,

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<sup>4</sup> According to Government's 'Planning Policy Guidance Note 1: General Policy and Principles', paragraph 64.

including north - even when clouds hide the sun. Direct sunlight is available, unless skies are overcast, from the southern sky, from the east through to the west, at a low angle in the winter, higher in summer.

An extension could badly affect a neighbour's home if it radically reduced the amount of daylight available through windows, or obstructs the path of direct sunlight to a once sunny garden or to a window [i.e., overshadowing].



An extension could overshadow windows and garden of a neighbouring property.

Blocking out sunlight is also undesirable because it reduces the 'passive solar heating' available to buildings, thus putting up energy costs.

Overshadowing is governed by the size, position and orientation [compass direction] of the

extension, and by relative land levels. The width of a building is often just as important (or more so) as its height in the overshadowing it may cause, because this will affect the length of time during which overshadowing will occur.

Overshadowing is more likely in late afternoon and early evening, and in winter – times when the sun is low in the sky.

The Council will assess the effect of an extension on the daylight available to adjacent dwellings by means of the '45-degree code'<sup>5</sup>.

Though not a strict rule, the 45-degree code is a rough guide used to ensure that an extension does not seriously affect a neighbour's outlook or day lighting.

To comply with the code, extensions should be designed so as not to cross a line drawn on plan, at an angle of 45 degrees from an adjoining neighbour's window that is the main source of natural light for a habitable room.

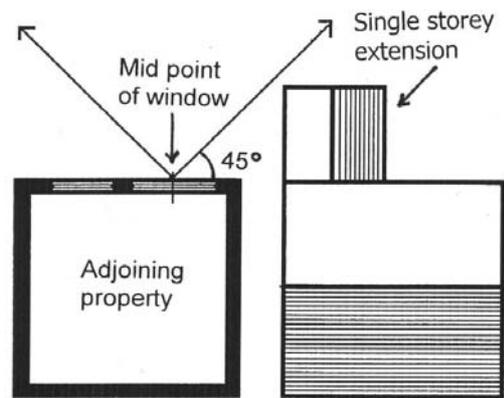
For single-storey extensions, the 45-degree line is taken from the mid point of the opening; for 2-storey extensions, the quarter point is used (See diagrams 1 and 2).

<sup>5</sup> Based on the Building Research Establishment's report 'Site Layout Planning for daylight and Sunlight' (1991)

Some reduction in daylight available to non-habitable rooms may not be a significant issue, but a radical reduction in light available to a habitable room could be unacceptable.

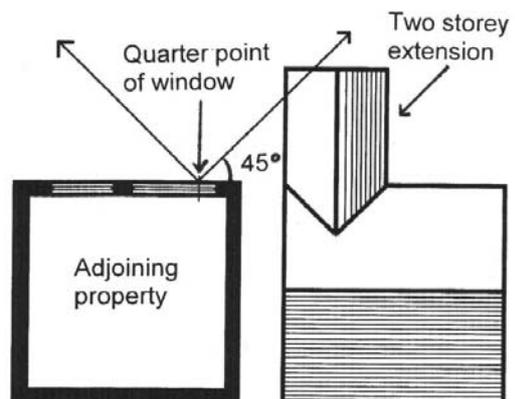
Building Regulations, quite separate from planning permission, set minimum standards in respect of daylight and ventilation of rooms. Your extension will be expected to conform to these standards - both in the rooms it would create, and in the rooms it would affect.

Diagram 1



This single storey extension does not cross the 45-degree line, drawn from the mid point of neighbour's window. It will normally be considered to have an acceptable effect on neighbour's daylight.

Diagram 2



This two-storey extension crosses the 45-degree line, drawn from the quarter point of neighbour's window. This extension will significantly reduce neighbour's daylight and so be unacceptable.

## Privacy and overlooking

It is not acceptable for an extension to have windows that overlook another dwelling's windows or private garden area to an unreasonable degree. Although a degree of overlooking is often unavoidable, some arrangements will clearly be unacceptable.

An extension's greatest potential for leading to unacceptable overlooking will usually come from windows on upper floors. The impact of overlooking is affected by distance (from window to window, or from window to garden) and the angle of view. The type of window [clear or obscured glass] and type of room [living room or landing] are also factors to be considered.

Sometimes, in order to protect against overlooking, planning permission is granted subject to a condition preventing the later installation of windows in particular positions. Some bathroom or landing windows are allowed in overlooking positions, but only if they have obscure glass.

Living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens and dining spaces are the most sensitive to overlooking, along with that part of the garden nearest the house. People are accustomed not

to be excessively overlooked in these spaces, whilst they may accept 'self-screening' of their bathrooms, for example.

Any overlooking from ground-floor windows can usually be screened by walls, fencing or planting, so single-storey extensions do not normally raise unsolvable issues of privacy, providing ground levels are similar.



Screening can usually prevent overlooking at ground floor level.

In order to maintain a reasonable relationship, respectful of privacy, between an extension and a neighbouring property, the following minimum distances will normally apply.

### Minimum distances for privacy

- Between facing windows of habitable rooms in single or two-storey dwellings - 22 metres.
- For two- or three-storey dwellings facing three-storey dwellings or two-storey dwellings with dormer windows in roof space – 28 metres.
- Between principal windows of one property and two-storey walls of another - 12 metres.
- Windows which would not directly face neighbouring properties but which may overlook the most sensitive parts of private gardens should normally be at least 10 metres distant.

Reasonable privacy may sometimes be secured through careful design rather than reliance on physical separation alone.

Since the publication of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing (2000)*, which encourages more efficient use of land, Swindon Borough Council has granted planning permission for high-density housing developments,

where the separation distances set out above have not been met. However, privacy [and sunlight/daylight issues] has in those cases been addressed through careful design of housing layout and consideration of the disposition of rooms within each dwelling.

The Council will seek to ensure that residential extensions do not unacceptably worsen existing residential amenity. Proposals for residential extensions shall only be permitted where there is no material detracting from a neighbour's enjoyment of light or privacy.

### Outlook

The Council will not normally grant planning permission for an extension that would seriously harm a neighbour's outlook by appearing unduly dominant and oppressive, whether by presenting a large blank wall or otherwise, when viewed from nearby windows or a garden.



This blank wall would have had an overbearing impact on a neighbour's property. Fortunately in this case it is beside a road.

Outlook is not a question of 'views', but of overbearing impact. It most often becomes a problem, as with issues of natural light, with large [including single-storey] rear extensions at or near the property boundary.

### **Noise and disturbance**

Upper level balconies, first floor patios and roof gardens can adversely affect privacy through overlooking. They may also give rise to unacceptable noise and other disturbance to neighbours.

The Council may refuse planning permission for enclosing flat roofs with railings, if this would increase the use of such spaces as 'outside rooms' with capacity to harm neighbouring amenity.

## **An extension should not lead to inadequate provision for car-parking or cause road-safety problems**

Building an extension can affect the car parking arrangements for your house. For example, a house extension might reduce parking space by building over an existing parking space. The addition of extra bedrooms may lead to a requirement for extra parking spaces. In either cases, if there is not sufficient land within the curtilage of the dwelling on which to provide parking space, the Council will need to be satisfied that a reasonable alternative location would not adversely affect road safety in the vicinity of the development.

In addition to its effect on parking provision, an extension may affect manoeuvring space for vehicles or lead to an alteration to existing access arrangements from the highway. Provision for the practical and safe manoeuvring of vehicles must not be threatened by an extension.

The Council will refuse planning permission for extensions that would cause road-safety problems.

A turning space within the curtilage of the house, in which a car can be turned right round through 180 degrees, may have to be provided in some cases, so as to avoid vehicles having to reverse onto a busy road. For turning spaces to be effective they must include adequate additional space for parking so that the turning area will be free from parked cars.



Garage set back from road so that garage doors can be opened without blocking the highway with a car.

To avoid blocking the highway whilst opening garage doors, garages accessed from a road should normally be set back to provide a full-length parking space of at least 6 metres in front of the garage.

It is Swindon Borough Council's policy that any development (normally garages) that is to be

accessed via an existing backway (rear lane) shall be constructed at least 3m back from the backway centreline. This is to ensure adequate space to manoeuvre in and out of the property.

At junctions between two backways, no development should occur within the area defined by a circle, with a 5m radius, measured from the junction in the centrelines of the two backways.

Detailed adopted standards and diagrams for turning spaces, driveways (including acceptable driveway gradients and surfacing) and garages are contained in *'Transport Requirements for Development – Local Guidance and Standards for Swindon'* (Swindon Borough Council, 2001).

## **An extension should not result in a home having too little private outdoor space**

A private outdoor space of sufficient size is important for leisure time and well-being.



Outdoor space used for flower garden and lawn.

Garden size is affected by an extension's plan-size or the introduction of a garage and turning area. A reduction in garden area

could actually devalue a property in spite of the additional house-space created.

Swindon Borough Council regards appropriate garden size as an essential part of the amenities of a neighbourhood, and gardens of a certain size may be an important part of the character of an area.

In determining applications for residential expansions Swindon Borough Council will normally seek to ensure that reasonable garden sizes, appropriate to size of house, are maintained.

## Appendices

### **Garages and freestanding ancillary buildings**

Garages or other domestic buildings such as workshops, hobby rooms, sheds or greenhouses may have a significant impact on neighbours' living conditions and the character of an area. They should conform to the four design principles for house extensions.

For garages, it will also be necessary to consider space for turning to avoid having to reverse onto a road. Road safety and the possibly disturbing effect of noise from car movements are issues to be considered. A garage is best placed between the front and rear building-lines. If located far back into the site it might result in a driveway that would cause unacceptable noise and disturbance to neighbours, as well as causing an excessive loss of garden space.

A garage should normally match the materials and roof shape of the house. In many cases, a pitched roof clad with slates or tiles will be suitable.

Size and height are important planning considerations. A shallow roof pitch and low eaves can help reduce overall size. To minimise height, a pitched roof should span the shortest side.



Two single doors have a more human scale than a single large double door.

In historic surroundings, a pair of hinged timber doors often looks more in character than 'up-and-over' metal doors. This is because two separate door openings have a more human scale.

### **Conservatories**

The siting and design of this popular form of extension can have a marked effect upon the character of a property. As much effort and skill should go into the design of a conservatory as would be required for any other extension.

The best location is at the rear of properties and the preferred construction is a painted

timber/uPVC and glass superstructure on a plinth whose external finish complements the existing house. 'Lean-to' forms are usually the least obtrusive.

A conservatory near the boundary can cause particular problems for privacy. A solid wall or obscure glazing and blinds on the boundary side can help, but may lead to overshadowing. If a boundary fence is retained for privacy, then an obscure-glazed elevation hard up against it could appear unsightly and incongruous when viewed from next door, particularly as glass near the boundary may not easily be kept clean from the outside.

### **Dormer windows and rooflights**

Badly designed dormer windows can spoil a building's appearance. In deciding whether to grant planning permission the Council will consider the size, shape, position and appearance of the dormer and the potential for unacceptable overlooking of other properties.

The design should be suitable to the existing building in terms of size and position. Traditional types of dormer windows with pitched roofs, and even roof-lights, are preferable to flat-roofed dormers.

Unless the street is characterised by dormers on the frontage, or front dormers are a feature of the area, dormers should be located on rear or secondary elevations.

As a general guide dormer units should be no wider than 1.2m. They should relate to the windows below, if possible by lining up with them. They should not rise above ridge level, and only in special cases should they be built flush with the wall below.



A traditional pitched roof dormer located well below the ridge of the roof.

Usually, the facing materials to be used should be the same as the main roof. Sometimes, the same material can be used for the "cheeks" and "gablet" of the dormer as for its roof, and this can help it blend in.

Where dormers are not acceptable, rooflights may be appropriate. The number of rooflights should be kept to an absolute minimum and

preferably confined to internal or rear roof slopes.

‘Conservation rooflights’ that do not project much above the roof covering and are less obtrusive than dormers – especially if they are not too large. To avoid overlooking, the recommended separation distances that apply to windows (see page 16) will also apply to dormer windows and certain rooflights.

### **Porches**

The size of a porch should be in scale with the house. It should be of simple gable design (with a pitch to match the house) or lean-to type. Flat roofed porches and those with low-pitched roofs usually look out of place.

An alternative to the full porch is a simple canopy, or door hood, which gives a degree of shelter whilst emphasising the importance of the front door. A partially enclosed porch, such as a trellis porch, is a compromise between the two.

Where the design of the house makes addition of a porch difficult, an alternative worth considering is the creation of an internal lobby.

### **Trees, hedges and vegetation**

An extension should not result in the loss of significant trees, hedges or other vegetation.



Trees, hedges and other vegetation soften the street scene and add to an area's attractiveness.

Vegetation is often important as a visual screen, providing privacy for residential properties, usually in the form of planting along property boundaries. Trees and hedges often make an important contribution to an area's character or appearance.

In some cases, conditions will be attached to planning permissions to ensure the retention of trees, shrubs and hedges, and their protection during construction works - or to provide new planting.

### **Walls and fences**

Depending on their height and materials, walls and fences can damage or enhance a building's setting and the overall appearance of an area. The maximum

acceptable height to provide an effective screen between properties is 1.8 metres. Walls taller than this will be overbearing.



Wall, fence and hedge forming a boundary.

Timber fences or brick walls are characteristic of most areas, but plain or decorative concrete block walls look out of character almost anywhere. For historic areas, natural stone walls are best or brick walls constructed with a suitable brick and appropriate pointing and bonding. Timber-boarded fences are rarely acceptable in the vicinity of listed buildings.

### **Access for disabled people**

It is estimated that 12% of the adult population are disabled in some way and new houses are built with at least one level access for wheelchair-using visitors. Current Building Regulations require a downstairs toilet with an accessible door and minimum width doors and corridors which make it easier for

people to remain in their homes if they become frail or disabled.

Extensions, including porches and conservatories, should protect these features.

The construction of a house extension can improve access to an older property if it is designed to meet the space and toilet sizes that the Building Regulations require for new houses. Where possible, an internal step should be avoided, and new patio doors should be provided with a level threshold not raised above floor level.

Swindon Borough Council requires a proportion of houses on new estates to be designed with the extra space someone in a wheelchair needs for turning and to be able to install a home lift and this may be an option for disabled people whose existing homes are difficult to extend. Advice about designs that can accommodate disabled people is available from the Council's Access Officers.

### **Historic areas and buildings**

Special considerations apply to listed buildings, buildings located within a conservation area and

other buildings of significant local interest.

It is normally undesirable to alter a historic building of special interest, whether by adding an extension, or otherwise. Altering them often reduces their special interest.

Enlarging them changes their size and shape, which may be what is interesting about them.

Where it is acceptable, extending a historic building requires great skill and care. In addition to following the four design principles, it is important to preserve original fabric, and features that possess architectural or historic interest (e.g. timber windows, chimneys, decorated ridge-tiles etc) should be retained.



Historic building with single-storey rear extension that allows the original form to remain quite clear.

Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic

interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. There are 28 conservation areas in Swindon Borough, each accompanied by a written document known as a 'conservation area appraisal' which defines and records that area's particular special interest.

Any development proposal in a conservation area, including house extensions, will be judged on its effect on the area's character and appearance, as identified in the relevant conservation area appraisal.

