

DESIGN GUIDANCE FOR HOUSE EXTENSIONS

Introduction

This design guide sets out useful information for people who are considering extending their house. Planning permission will normally be granted for extensions provided that their appearance is acceptable when judged against policies contained in the Development Plan and in particular policy STR1 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and policy BD/3 of the West Somerset District Local Plan. The advice contained in this guidance note will also be a significant material consideration in determining planning applications for house extensions. Therefore, if the guidance is followed, your extension is more likely to be granted planning permission, and unnecessary delays should be avoided. Equally, applications for extensions that show designs that are poor in quality and do not respect the character of the property and the locality, will be refused.

This note gives guidance on five main aspects:

1. **Neighbourliness**
2. **Respecting the character of the property**
3. **Respecting the character of the locality**
4. **Particular types of extension**
5. **Supporting design information to be submitted with a planning application**

NEIGHBOURLINESS

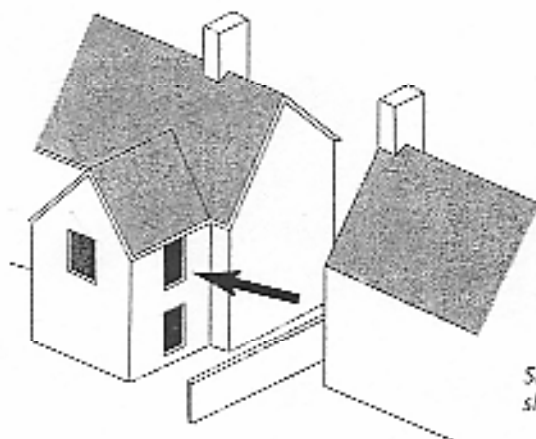
Before submitting a planning application you are advised to first speak to your neighbours about the proposed extension. They may have suggestions that could be incorporated in the design in order to overcome any concerns they may have. It is also better that they hear of the proposal first from you rather than when the Council statutorily notifies them of the application. Any views expressed by neighbours will be taken into account when assessing and determining the application.

Neighbours in turn have to recognize that the basic question for the local planning authority is not whether they would experience financial or other loss from a potential development. Rather it is whether the proposal would materially or unacceptably affect amenities which ought to be protected in the public interest. As a general term, good neighbourliness is a material planning consideration by which development proposals can be assessed. This includes more specifically, privacy, sunlight and daylight, and outlook (not views).

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 other with views over boundary fences or hedges directly into neighbouring houses should be avoided. However, obscure glazed windows to bathrooms or high level windows (ie. internal sill of 1.7m above floor level) to other rooms may be acceptable in such situations.

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 however depend upon the height of the fence and the respective ground floor levels of the properties concerned.



Side windows which could cause loss of privacy to the neighbour should be avoided

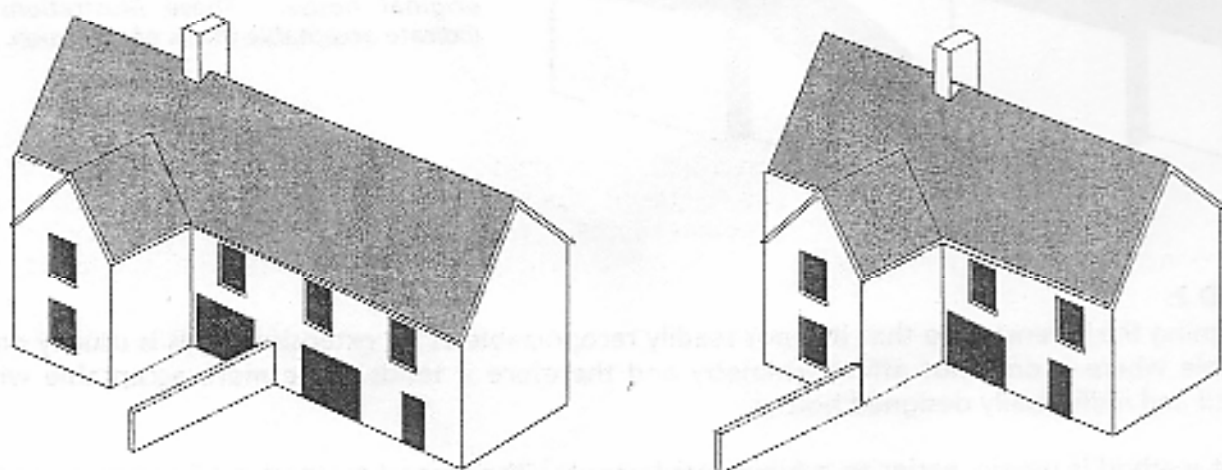
Daylight and Sunlight

An extension should not cause any significant loss of daylight or sunlight to principal rooms of adjoining dwellings. For the purposes of this guidance, the term principal room refers to the main habitable rooms of a dwelling but excludes rooms/areas such as halls, lobbies, bathrooms and toilets. Nor should extensions 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.

This design guidance is not intended to be prescriptive and each planning application needs to be considered on its merits. It is therefore considered to be too objective to introduce definite measures by which to assess the suitability or not of a particular proposal in respect of loss of sunlight and/or daylight. There are various influencing factors such as design, 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 relevant to ground levels and whether there are any further and larger unaffected windows lighting the same room. However, daylight and sunlight are very important considerations and substantive infringement of these rights could lead to a refusal of the planning application.

Outlook

The effect of an extension on someone's view is not a material planning consideration. However, an extension should not appear unduly prominent from the neighbour's property whereby material factors such as dominating effect could be a reason for refusal. An example could be a proposed two-storey extension built on the common boundary between a pair of semi-detached or terraced houses in close proximity to a ground floor lounge window and the extension projects out from the main wall of the existing house by an unacceptable distance. The combined effect of proximity and projection could contravene matters of prominence and dominance.



The size of an extension should not be excessive in relation to the existing house. The extension illustrated above left is acceptable. That shown on the right likely to be harmful.

RESPECTING THE CHARACTER OF THE PROPERTY

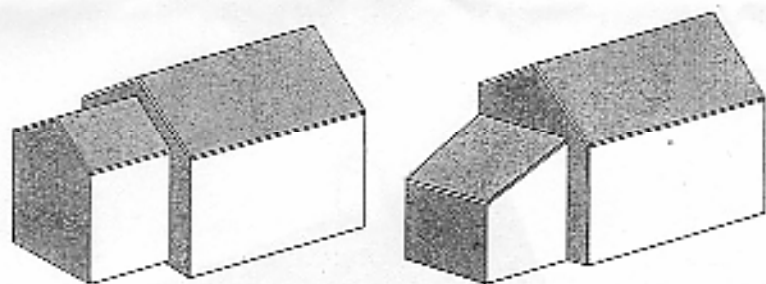
Shape and Form of the Extension

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 although the cumulative impact of small extensions over time can be equally as harmful. Therefore it can be the case that even a small extension on a house that has been extended several times may be unacceptable. In addition extensions, which detract from the overall shape and style of the original building, will not normally be acceptable.

There are essentially two methods of handling the form of extensions so that they harmonize with the appearance of the house:

METHOD 1

By making the extension subordinate to the house thereby minimizing its impact and enabling the form of the original house to be appreciated. This approach is particularly 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. It involves setting the extension back (by at least a metre) from the main elevations of the existing house and creating a lower ridge to the roof. It can be the case however that in dealing with tall three storey houses, a single storey extension on the side while being very subordinate in height could be very detrimental to the character of the house by not respecting the form (ie. three storey) of the house. Also, extensions that are very wide and match or exceed the width of the house can be harmful to the character of the property by making the building look disproportionate or 'lopsided'.

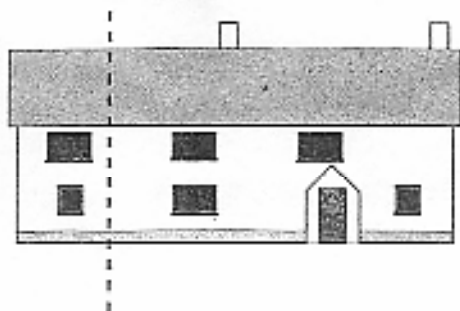


Extensions should be subordinate to the house to minimise the impact on the original house. These illustrations indicate acceptable forms of extension.

METHOD 2:

By designing the extension so that it is not readily recognizable as an extension. This is usually only acceptable where it does not affect symmetry and therefore it tends to be more acceptable with detached and individually designed houses.

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



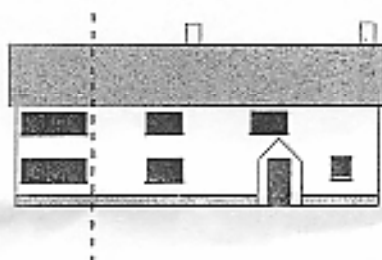
An extension which is designed to appear as part of the original house may only be acceptable where it does not alter the symmetry of the house.

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 fascia 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.

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. An exception can be some period houses where the irregular positioning of windows may be part of their charm. It is also important to note that for many of the older houses in West Somerset that are indicative of the local vernacular, it will be appropriate to ensure that on each elevation of the extension there is a strong proportional balance of more 'wall to window'. In such older properties the amount of glazing was often kept to a minimum due in a large part to prevailing adverse weather conditions.



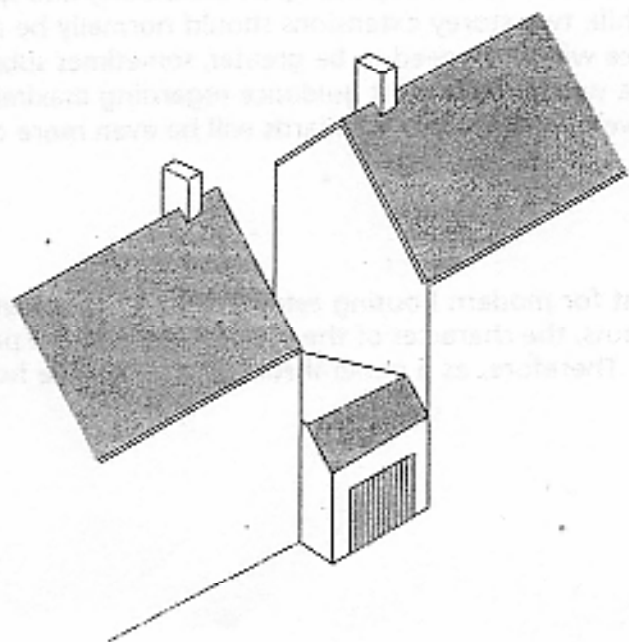
There should be good proportional balance of more "wall" than "window". This illustration shows an unacceptable design.

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 suppliers should be able to advise you. In the event that matching bricks are not available the Council may consider accepting a different design approach and/or use of different materials as it can be more harmful to the appearance of the building to use a brick that only nearly matches.

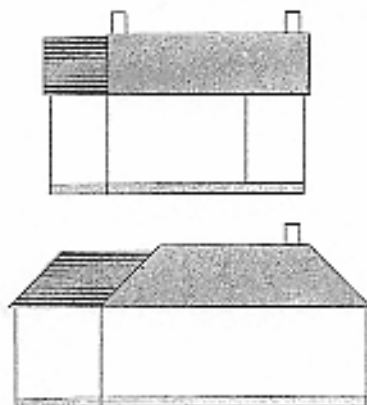
Care should be taken to match as far as possible original mortar colour, pointing and bonding of the brick and tiles used in the existing house. Natural and traditional materials such as clay tiles, slates and stock bricks are favoured in general as, particularly for older properties, the use of these materials will sustain local distinctiveness. In Conservation Areas the use of traditional materials will be essential in order to conserve and enhance their character and quality.

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



Dummy pitched roofs should be avoided.

New roof ridges should not exceed the height of the original and normally should be lower. It is 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.

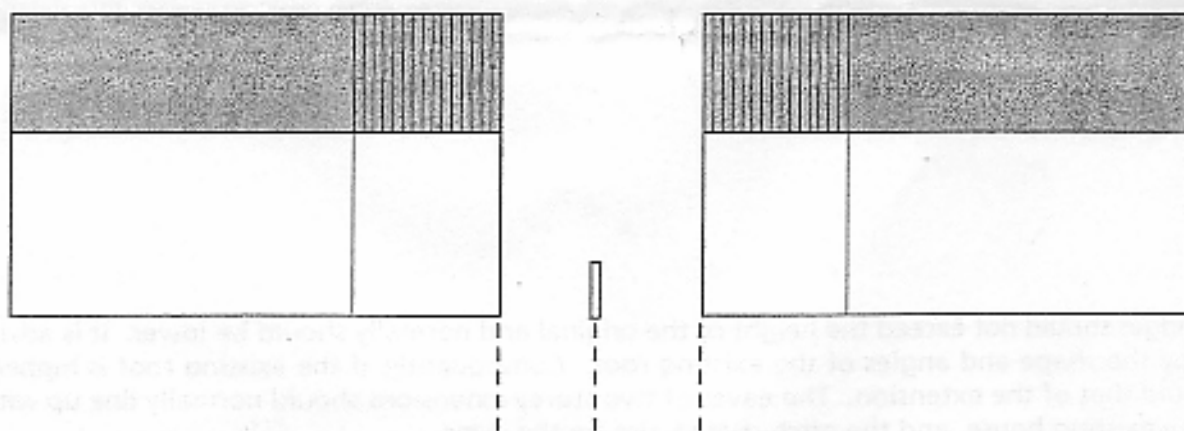


New roofs should not exceed the height of the original and should normally be lower. If the existing roof is hipped so should that of the extension.

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 that 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. On more recent housing sites, in line with Government guidance regarding maximizing the potential of the site through high-density development, space standards will be even more critical.

While the above advice is particularly relevant for modern housing estates where the spaces around the houses are less than on older housing layouts, the character of the street scene and the pattern of development will still need to be respected. Therefore, as a general rule, the larger the house, the greater the space around it will be needed.



Two storey extensions should normally be at least 1 metre away from a side boundary.

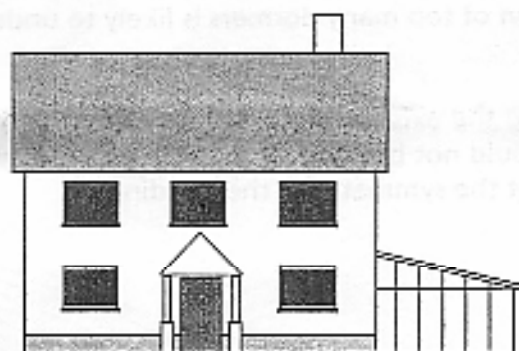
PARTICULAR TYPES OF EXTENSION

Conservatories

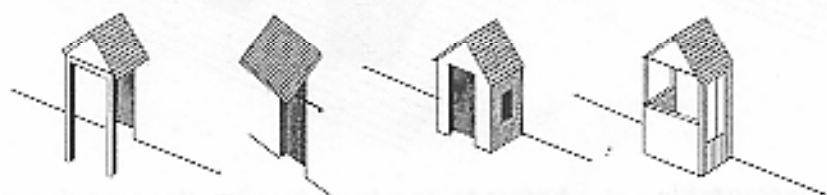
Conservatories can offer a relatively inexpensive and flexible way of increasing accommodation. They are becoming a significant feature in residential areas. A well designed conservatory can add interest to a house. However, the appearance of numerous conservatories of mixed designs and colours in publicly prominent positions can spoil the overall character of a residential area. In this regard it is unlikely that conservatories on principal elevations of a house that are publicly visible e.g. Face a highway, will be acceptable not only to the appearance of the house but also to the street scene, particularly where a precedent would be set. Conservatories to older properties that have retained much of their original architectural integrity should be designed to respect the character of the property which may involve the use of traditional materials i.e. timber.

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. The problems of ill-designed porches will be exemplified in a terrace of houses and can spoil the overall appearance of the terrace.



Conservatories to older houses should respect their character.



A porch must relate to the character of the house. Here are some examples of traditional porches.



Loft Conversions and Roof Extensions

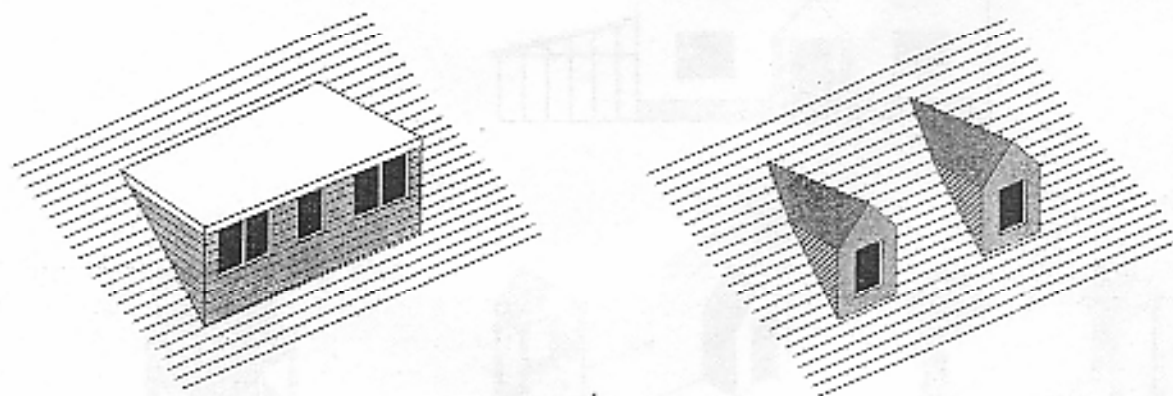
Loft conversions are a popular method of creating extra space and can be achieved through relatively minor alterations. Sometimes they will not require planning permission. However, if the house has already been extended and dormer windows are proposed (particularly on the roof slope that fronts the highway) proposed, permission may be required. It is advisable to check first with the Council's planning department who will almost certainly have to put you in touch with the building regulation section.

Some houses 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 and rooflights.

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 clearly be 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 that dominate the roof slope. The Council will resist this style of dormer. 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 that extend above the existing ridge height 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.



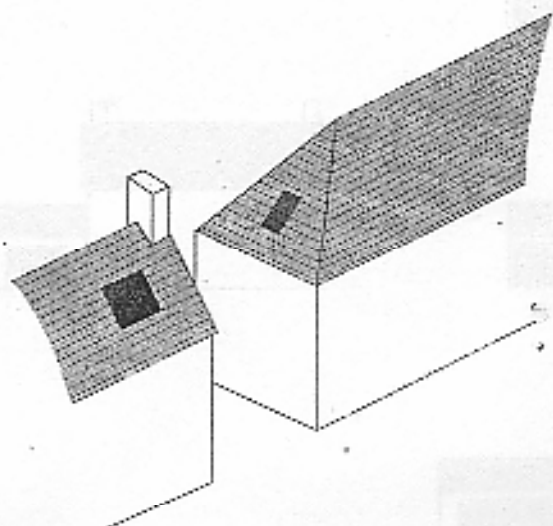
Large flat roofed dormers are unacceptable – it is better to construct two smaller traditional dormers.



The aim should be to retain the maximum area of uninterrupted roof slope.

Rooflights

The installation of one or two rooflights in a house that do not materially affect the external appearance of the property generally do not require planning permission. However care should still be taken in installing 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 (often referred to as 'conservation rooflights') and which do not protrude above it.



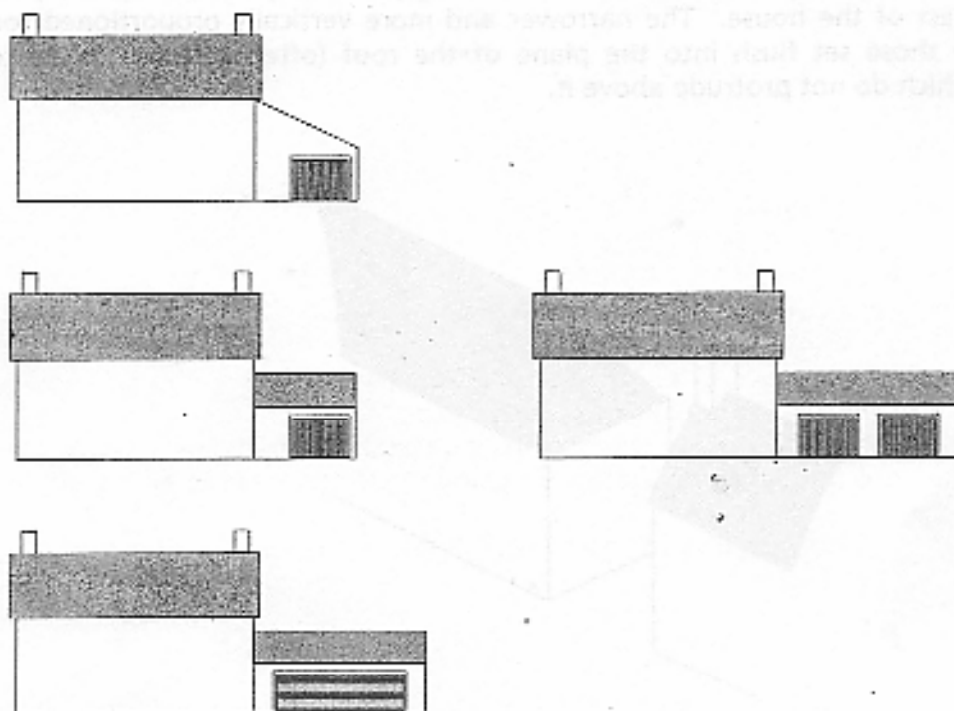
Large square roof lights can disrupt the proportions of the house. Narrower, smaller and more vertically proportioned roof lights are preferable.

Garages

A garage, like other extensions, is usually better set back from the face of the existing house. It is a utility structure that 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. For many older rural properties, a garage would not have been an original feature of the house and unless designed and sited correctly, and also an appropriate size (a large double garage would not be an appropriate feature to serve a small 'two up, two down' house) a new garage can introduce a utilitarian structure that undermines the setting and character of the house. To reflect the age and rural location of such properties, a well designed open fronted substantially constructed car port under a traditional pitched roof may be an appropriate alternative.

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 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 under a pitched roof in an integrated design.



A garage at the side of a house should be set back from the front wall and should have a pitched roof.

The proportions of a double garage are better if there are two single garage doors separated by a pillar instead of a wide double door. Also timber rather than metal doors are preferred for traditional houses.

SUPPORTING DESIGN INFORMATION TO BE SUBMITTED WITH A PLANNING APPLICATION

While this design guide is useful to the Council in determining planning applications for house extensions and also for prospective applicants, the Council will still expect to see submitted with planning applications a short design statement setting out the applicants supporting reasons for arriving at the design of extension being applied for. This approach is supported by Government advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 1: 'General Policy and Principles' where at Annex A it states that "applicants for planning permission should, as a minimum, provide a short written statement setting out the design principles adopted....". Clearly the level of information required will vary on the nature and complexity of the application, but bearing in mind the criteria set out above by which applications will be considered, it is appropriate that with reference to the design guide, the scheme is justified in design terms.

If you are unsure about how your design may be considered or you wish to receive any informal advice from a planning officer, you are encouraged to contact the planning office for which the main Council telephone number is 01643 703704.