

Planning a House Extension

A Practical Homeowner's Guide

Clear guidance on planning permission, design, budgets and the extension process.



Planning Permission
Explained



Budgets &
Costs



Step-by-Step
Process



Design Ideas &
Practical Tips



Mistakes
to Avoid

PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM CHARTERED ARCHITECTS

22 PAGES • 2026 EDITION

What's inside

Planning a house extension involves far more than deciding how large the new space should be. A successful project balances design, planning permission, permitted development, Building Regulations, budget, structure, drainage, daylight and the way the finished home will work in everyday life. This guide walks through every major decision, in the order you'll meet them.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This booklet is written for homeowners in England considering an extension. It explains the typical journey, the decisions that matter most, and the common mistakes that add cost or delay. Figures are early-budgeting guidance, not quotations — always obtain project-specific advice before committing.

Section 01

Is a house extension the right solution?

The first question should not be, "How large an extension can we build?" It should be: **what problem are we trying to solve?**

Many homeowners assume they need more floor area when the real issue is poor circulation, a badly positioned kitchen, limited natural light or rooms that no longer suit the way the household lives.

An extension may be the right solution where you need a larger kitchen and dining area, a better connection with the garden, a home office, a utility room, an accessible ground-floor bedroom, extra bedrooms or bathrooms, improved storage or more flexible family space.

In some cases, internal reconfiguration can achieve more than simply adding floor space. Moving a doorway, removing a poorly positioned wall or combining underused rooms may create a better result at a lower cost. The strongest projects often combine a carefully sized extension with improvements to the existing house.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE DRAWING AN EXTENSION

- ✓ Which existing rooms work well?
- ✓ Which rooms are rarely used?
- ✓ Where do bottlenecks occur?
- ✓ How does the house connect with the garden?
- ✓ Where does natural light currently come from?
- ✓ What storage is missing?
- ✓ Will your needs change within five to ten years?
- ✓ What construction budget is realistically available?
- ✓ Would extending improve the property enough to justify the investment?
- ✓ Are there planning, drainage, access or neighbour constraints?

ARCHITECT'S TIP

Test the plan before you maximise the size

A larger extension is not automatically a better one. Before fixing the depth or width, test furniture layouts, circulation, daylight and the relationship with the existing rooms. A smaller, better-planned addition can create a more useful home — and reduce construction cost.

Section 02

Types of house extension

A well-designed extension should feel like it has always belonged to the property – not appear as an obvious addition. Proportions, roof forms, materials and internal layout usually matter more than overall size.

Not every extension suits every property. The best solution depends on the existing house, the available site, planning constraints, budget and how you intend to use the finished space. Below are the most common types used throughout England.

MOST COMMON

Single-storey rear extensions

Typically used to create larger kitchens, dining spaces and family rooms with improved connections to the garden.

- Excellent value for money
- Strong indoor–outdoor relationship
- Ideal for open-plan living
- Usually the simplest construction
- Often built under Permitted Development

UNDERUSED LAND

Side extensions

Many detached and semi-detached houses have underused land to the side that can accommodate valuable additional floor area. Success depends heavily on maintaining appropriate spacing, roof design and the character of the street.

- Utility rooms
- Home offices
- Larger kitchens
- Accessible bedrooms
- Additional living space

REAR + SIDE COMBINED

Wrap-around extensions

A wrap-around combines a rear and side extension to transform the ground floor into one continuous living space. Because they alter more of the original building, careful architectural planning is particularly important.

- Large kitchen islands
- Dining areas
- Family rooms
- Utility spaces & pantries
- Better circulation throughout

SPACE OVER TWO FLOORS

Two-storey extensions

Adding accommodation over two floors is often one of the most cost-effective ways to gain substantial space. Planning considerations such as overlooking, daylight and the relationship with neighbours become significantly more important.

- Extra bedrooms
- New bathrooms
- Larger master suites
- Home offices
- Enlarged living below

SENSITIVE TO THE STREET

Front extensions

Less common, as they have a greater impact on the appearance of the street and often require planning permission. When designed sensitively they can improve entrance halls, accessibility and internal circulation while respecting the character of the surrounding area.

QUICK & ECONOMICAL

Garage conversions

Converting an existing garage is often one of the quickest and most economical ways to add accommodation. It avoids much of the structural work of a new extension while making better use of existing floor area.

- Home offices
- Playrooms
- Ground-floor bedrooms
- Utility rooms
- Accessible living space

Section 03

Planning permission & permitted development

Planning permission controls how development affects the property, neighbouring homes, the street and the wider area. Building Regulations are separate — an extension may not need a planning application but may still need Building Regulations approval.

There are three common planning routes for a house extension in England:

1

PERMITTED
DEVELOPMENT

2

PRIOR APPROVAL
(LARGER EXTENSION)

3

HOUSEHOLDER
PLANNING PERMISSION

What is permitted development?

Permitted development rights provide a national planning permission for certain defined forms of development. A qualifying extension can be built without a normal householder planning application, provided every relevant limitation and condition is satisfied.

Permitted development is not a relaxed version of planning permission. It is a technical, rules-based system: the proposal either complies with all the applicable requirements, or it does not.

WHAT CAN AFFECT PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

- ✓ The dimensions and height of the extension
- ✓ The position of the extension
- ✓ The width of the original house
- ✓ Previous extensions and additions
- ✓ The amount of garden land covered
- ✓ Distance from boundaries
- ✓ Materials
- ✓ Conservation area or other designated-land restrictions
- ✓ Conditions that removed permitted development rights
- ✓ Article 4 Directions
- ✓ Whether the property is a house, flat or maisonette

GOOD TO KNOW

Permitted development still needs proof

Even where an extension is permitted development, it is wise to obtain a Lawful Development Certificate from the local authority. It provides formal confirmation that the work is lawful – valuable reassurance when you later sell the property.

Section 04

Building Regulations

Building Regulations ensure an extension is safe, structurally sound, energy efficient and suitable for occupation. They focus on **how** the extension is constructed, rather than whether it is acceptable in planning terms.

Almost every house extension will require Building Regulations approval, regardless of whether planning permission is needed.

What Building Regulations cover

- **Part A** – Structure
- **Part B** – Fire safety
- **Part C** – Site preparation & moisture
- **Part D** – Toxic substances
- **Part E** – Resistance to sound
- **Part F** – Ventilation
- **Part H** – Drainage & waste
- **Part J** – Combustion appliances
- **Part K** – Protection from falling
- **Part L** – Conservation of fuel & power
- **Part M** – Access to & use of buildings
- **Part P** – Electrical safety

BEFORE SUBMITTING BUILDING REGULATIONS DRAWINGS

- ✓ Measured survey completed
- ✓ Planning drawings agreed
- ✓ Structural engineer appointed
- ✓ Drainage strategy considered
- ✓ Heating and ventilation reviewed
- ✓ Electrical layout considered
- ✓ Insulation strategy developed
- ✓ Windows and doors specified

ARCHITECT'S TIP

Building Regulations drawings save money on site

Comprehensive technical drawings reduce uncertainty during construction. Builders can price the work more accurately, construction is less likely to stop while details are resolved, and the risk of unexpected costs is significantly reduced.

Section 05

How much does an extension cost in 2026?

The cost of a house extension varies considerably. Size matters, but it is only one part of the calculation.

The final budget is also shaped by the property's location, ground conditions, structural design, access, specification, glazing, drainage alterations, kitchen and bathroom choices, the amount of work to the existing house, and the level of professional information prepared before construction.

As broad early-stage guidance, a completed house extension in the UK may cost approximately **£1,800–£3,000 per m² excluding VAT**. Straightforward projects with standard finishes sit towards the lower end; complex or highly specified extensions can exceed the upper end. These figures are not contractor quotations – a project-specific cost plan or competitive pricing is required before making firm commitments.

£1,800

PER M² — LOWER END
(STANDARD FINISHES)

£3,000+

PER M² — UPPER END
(COMPLEX / PREMIUM)

IMPORTANT

Cost per square metre is only a starting point

Two extensions with the same floor area can cost very differently. One may use simple foundations, modest openings and standard finishes; another may need deep foundations, drainage diversions, extensive steelwork, large-format glazing and major alterations to the existing house.

Illustrative extension budgets (excluding VAT)

PROJECT	INDICATIVE BUDGET
20 m ² standard single-storey extension	£40,000 – £56,000
30 m ² standard single-storey extension	£60,000 – £84,000
50 m ² standard single-storey extension	£100,000 – £140,000
60 m ² two-storey extension	£108,000 – £180,000
15 m ² garage conversion	£8,500 – £20,000

Broad early-stage allowances for budgeting only. Consistent with current UK guidance (e.g. Checkatrade, June 2026). Always obtain project-specific quotations and check current BCIS information.

WHAT THE TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET SHOULD INCLUDE

- ✓ Construction work
- ✓ Windows, doors and roof glazing
- ✓ Kitchen and bathroom fittings
- ✓ Flooring, decoration & fitted joinery
- ✓ Heating, plumbing and electrical work
- ✓ Architectural fees
- ✓ Structural engineer's fees
- ✓ Measured survey costs
- ✓ Planning & Building Control fees
- ✓ Drainage or tree surveys where required
- ✓ Party wall surveyor's fees where applicable
- ✓ External works and landscaping
- ✓ VAT
- ✓ Contingency
- ✓ Temporary accommodation or storage

What makes an extension more expensive?

- Restricted access for plant, skips and materials
- Deep or unusual foundations
- Trees and shrinkable clay soils
- Building over or diverting drainage
- Large structural openings
- Extensive demolition and temporary support
- Complex roof forms
- Large areas of bespoke glazing
- Premium kitchens and bathrooms
- Major heating or electrical upgrades
- Work to occupied areas of the house
- Listed buildings or specialist materials

- Late design changes during construction

Where can homeowners save money?

The most effective savings usually come from simplifying the design *before* construction rather than reducing quality after work has started. A compact rectangular footprint, sensible structural spans, standard-sized openings and an efficient roof form can reduce cost without compromising the finished home. Detailed drawings before builders price the work also make quotations easier to compare and reduce unresolved assumptions.

ARCHITECT'S TIP

Protect the brief before reducing the specification

When a project exceeds budget, first identify which design decisions are driving cost. Simplifying structure, glazing or roof geometry may preserve the accommodation and design intent more successfully than cutting finishes indiscriminately.

EXTENSION BUDGET CHECK

- ✓ Confirm whether figures include or exclude VAT
- ✓ Separate the extension cost from refurbishment to the existing house
- ✓ Include professional and statutory fees
- ✓ Allow for kitchens, bathrooms and finishes
- ✓ Include external works and landscaping
- ✓ Check whether drainage alterations are required
- ✓ Include a contingency for unknown conditions
- ✓ Obtain quotations based on coordinated technical information

Section 06

Designing a successful extension

A successful extension should improve the **whole house**, not simply add another room to the back. The strongest schemes resolve circulation, storage, natural light, privacy, furniture layout and the garden relationship all at once.

Start with the plan

The floor plan determines how the completed home will work every day. Before fixing the size of the extension, test how people will move through the space, where furniture will sit, how storage will be incorporated, and whether different activities can happen comfortably at the same time.

TEST THE PLAN BEFORE FIXING THE WALLS

- ✓ How will people enter and move through the extension?
- ✓ Will circulation pass through the main seating area?
- ✓ Is the kitchen close to groceries, bins and utility space?
- ✓ Where will coats, shoes and household items be stored?
- ✓ Can furniture be arranged without blocking doors?
- ✓ Is there a quieter room away from the main family space?
- ✓ Does the room have enough usable wall space?
- ✓ Will the layout still work as the household changes?

ARCHITECT'S TIP

Draw the furniture before finalising the walls

A room can look generous on a plan yet still be difficult to furnish. Test the kitchen, dining table, seating, storage and circulation before committing to the footprint or structural openings.

Avoid oversized open-plan spaces

Open-plan living can improve daylight and family connection, but bigger is not always better. An oversized room may suffer from poor acoustics, cooking smells, limited privacy, difficult furniture arrangements and high heating demand — and may require expensive structural openings and excessive glazing. Consider instead:

- Partial walls
- Sliding or pocket doors
- Built-in joinery
- Changes in ceiling height
- Different lighting zones
- A centrally positioned fireplace
- Carefully retained structural elements
- Clear kitchen, dining and seating zones

This approach is often called **broken-plan living**. It preserves visual connection while allowing different activities to take place more comfortably.

Design for natural light

A deep rear extension can reduce daylight to the original middle rooms of the house. Natural light should be considered in both plan and section — the position of rooflights, windows and internal openings can matter more than the total amount of glazing.

- Rooflights above the old/new junction
- Clerestory windows
- Glazed gables
- Internal courtyards
- Higher ceilings
- Side windows where privacy allows
- Carefully positioned openings between rooms
- Light-reflective internal finishes

COMMON MISTAKE

Don't place all the glazing at the garden end

Large rear doors may brighten the extension while leaving the original middle room dark. Daylight often needs to be introduced from above, or closer to the connection between the existing house and the new addition.

Create a strong connection with the garden

A good garden connection is about more than the widest possible set of doors. The design should consider views, privacy, level changes, patio position, drainage, sunlight and the routes to bins or side access. A smaller opening framing a good view may be more effective than full-width glazing facing a fence.

- The direction of the main view
- Morning and evening sunlight

- Patio and external seating positions
- Privacy from neighbouring properties
- Threshold levels and accessibility
- External drainage
- Routes to bins and side access
- Boundary planting and screening

Match the existing house — or create a contrast?

An extension can be designed to blend with the existing property or to appear as a clearly contemporary addition. A matching approach may repeat brick, roof tiles, window proportions and traditional details. A contrasting approach may use timber, metal, render, dark brick, large-format glazing or a flat roof. Neither is automatically better — the design should have a clear rationale and respond to the scale, proportions and character of the original house.

ARCHITECT'S TIP

Good contrast is deliberate, not accidental

A contemporary extension can work beautifully beside a traditional house when its scale, proportions and junctions are carefully resolved. Poorly matched materials or arbitrary forms can make even an expensive extension look disconnected.

Section 07

How long does an extension take?

A house extension is usually a multi-stage project, not a single construction exercise. Time is needed to develop the brief, survey, design, gain approvals, coordinate structure, secure prices and build.

For many straightforward extensions, the complete journey from first consultation to completion may take around **nine to fifteen months**. Larger, more complex or heavily constrained projects can take longer.

IMPORTANT

Don't plan around the construction period alone

Homeowners often focus on how many months the builder will be on site. The design, approval and tender stages beforehand are equally important and should be in the programme from the very beginning.

Typical extension programme

- **Initial consultation & brief** 1–2 WEEKS
- **Measured survey & existing drawings** 1–3 WEEKS
- **Concept design & revisions** 3–6 WEEKS
- **Planning / permitted development preparation** 2–4 WEEKS
- **Planning determination (where required)** ~8 WEEKS
- **Building Regulations & structural design** 4–8 WEEKS
- **Contractor pricing & appointment** 4–8 WEEKS
- **Construction** ~4–8 MONTHS
- **Completion & final certification** 1–3 WEEKS

The seven stages, in detail

1

Brief and feasibility

Establishes what the project needs to achieve and whether the property can accommodate it — reviewing the existing layout, planning history, permitted development rights, neighbouring relationships, site constraints and the initial budget. Resolving these early prevents time spent on an unrealistic proposal.

2

Measured survey

Records the existing building and site so reliable drawings can be prepared — floor plans, elevations, roof information, levels, drainage positions and relevant neighbouring features. Inaccurate existing information causes problems later when openings, roof junctions and boundaries are developed.

3

Concept design

Tests different layouts and architectural approaches before the project is fixed — comparing sizes, room arrangements, roof forms, glazing, daylight strategies and garden connections. Several rounds of review may be needed; allowing enough time here is more efficient than making major changes later.

4

Planning approval

Some extensions need householder planning permission; others fall within permitted development. Where an application is required, the authority normally has eight weeks to determine a valid application.

Permitted development projects may instead use a Lawful Development Certificate or, for certain larger rear extensions, the prior approval process.

5

Technical design & Building Regulations

Detailed construction information is prepared — coordination with the structural engineer and consideration of foundations, insulation, drainage, ventilation, fire safety, roof construction, windows, doors and junctions with the existing house. The more coordinated this is, the easier the project is to price and build.

6

Contractor pricing

Contractors should ideally price the same coordinated package of drawings, making quotations easier to compare and reducing hidden assumptions. Allow time for site visits, document review, subcontractor pricing and questions before quotations are submitted.

7

Construction

A straightforward single-storey extension may take around four to six months on site; a two-storey, highly specified or extensively remodelled project may need six to nine months or longer.

TYPICAL CONSTRUCTION SEQUENCE

- ✓ Site setup and demolition
- ✓ Groundworks and foundations
- ✓ Drainage alterations
- ✓ Structural frame and walls
- ✓ Roof construction
- ✓ Windows and external doors
- ✓ First-fix services
- ✓ Insulation and plastering
- ✓ Second-fix joinery and services
- ✓ Kitchen and bathroom installation
- ✓ Decoration and finishes
- ✓ External works
- ✓ Testing, inspections and completion

COMMON MISTAKE

Build contingency into your move-in date

Weather, hidden defects, delayed materials, utility work and client changes can all affect programmes. Avoid arranging removals, tenancy endings or major family commitments around the earliest possible completion date.

Section 08

Choosing the right architect

The quality of the finished extension is heavily influenced by decisions made before construction begins. Choosing an architect is about much more than obtaining planning permission.

A well-designed project should respond to the way you live, maximise natural light, use space efficiently and give contractors clear information for pricing and construction. The best outcomes usually come from careful design, technical coordination and ongoing professional advice throughout the project.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE APPOINTING AN ARCHITECT

- ✓ Will the architect personally manage my project?
- ✓ Do they specialise in residential work?
- ✓ Can they show completed projects similar to mine?
- ✓ Will they prepare Building Regulations drawings?
- ✓ How are structural engineers coordinated?
- ✓ What services are included in the fee?
- ✓ How many design options are normally explored?
- ✓ How is communication handled during the project?

What should an architect provide?

Every practice works slightly differently, but a professionally managed residential project usually includes several distinct stages rather than simply producing planning drawings. Each stage builds on the last, reducing uncertainty and helping the project progress smoothly into construction.

- Initial consultation
- Measured survey
- Concept design
- Planning drawings
- Planning application management
- Building Regulations drawings
- Coordination with structural engineers
- Tender information
- Construction advice where appointed

ARCHITECT'S TIP

The cheapest design fee is rarely the lowest overall cost

Professional fees usually represent only a small proportion of the total construction budget. Careful design, coordinated technical drawings and early problem-solving can prevent costly changes during construction — often delivering better long-term value than the lowest initial fee.

Designer, technician or architect?

Different professionals can prepare drawings for residential projects, but their training and services vary. Architects are trained to balance planning policy, design quality, technical detailing, spatial planning, construction and long-term usability. Architectural technologists and technicians often provide excellent technical drawing services, while specialist consultants may advise on planning or structural matters. The right choice depends on the complexity of the project and the level of design input required.

PLANNING YOUR OWN EXTENSION?

Let's talk about your home.

Every property is different, and the right solution depends on your home, your budget and your long-term plans. At Hepburn Architects we specialise in residential architecture — extensions, loft conversions, renovations, new homes and small residential developments.

If you're considering extending your home, we're happy to discuss your ideas and explain the planning process, likely costs and the design opportunities available for your property.

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