

House Extension Checklist

A practical pre-design checklist for homeowners preparing to extend, remodel or improve their home.

How to use this checklist

Work through each section before your first architectural consultation. You do not need every answer, but identifying uncertainties early will make the design process more productive and help avoid preventable cost and delay.

1. Define the brief

Start with the problems you need to solve rather than a fixed extension size or shape.

- ☐ List the rooms or areas of the existing house that do not work well.
- ☐ Identify circulation bottlenecks, dark spaces and unused rooms.
- ☐ Decide whether you need more floor area, a better layout, or both.
- ☐ Record your preferred kitchen, dining and living arrangement.
- ☐ Consider whether you need a utility room, pantry, study or ground-floor bedroom.
- ☐ Think about storage for coats, shoes, cleaning equipment and household items.
- ☐ Consider privacy, noise and whether one quieter room should remain separate.
- ☐ Think about how your needs may change over the next five to ten years.

2. Understand the property

- ☐ Find any existing plans, planning approvals or Building Regulations records.
- ☐ Check whether the property is listed or within a conservation area.
- ☐ Confirm whether previous extensions have already used part of the available permitted development allowance.
- ☐ Identify visible drains, inspection chambers, trees and level changes.
- ☐ Check whether there are shared drains or sewers close to the proposed work.
- ☐ Note side access, driveway width and likely access for skips and materials.
- ☐ Identify party walls, shared boundaries and neighbouring windows.
- ☐ Record any known defects, movement, damp or roof problems.

3. Set a realistic budget

Your full project budget should include more than the builder's core construction price.

- ☐ Set a maximum total budget, including VAT.

- ☐ Separate the extension cost from refurbishment to the existing house.
- ☐ Allow for kitchen, bathroom, flooring, decoration and fitted joinery.
- ☐ Include architect, structural engineer and other consultant fees.
- ☐ Include planning, Building Control and statutory application fees.
- ☐ Allow for drainage work, surveys, trees or party wall advice where required.
- ☐ Include external works, patios, landscaping and boundary alterations.
- ☐ Keep a contingency for hidden conditions and design development.
- ☐ Consider temporary accommodation, storage or moving costs.

Budget reminder

Two extensions of the same size can have very different costs. Structure, access, foundations, drainage, glazing, specification and alterations to the existing house can all materially affect the final price.

4. Test the design properly

- ☐ Test furniture layouts before fixing wall positions.
- ☐ Check that circulation does not cut through the main seating area.
- ☐ Review natural light in the original middle rooms as well as the extension.
- ☐ Consider rooflights or high-level glazing near the junction of old and new.
- ☐ Confirm that the kitchen layout allows sensible working and storage space.
- ☐ Check whether large openings will require significant structural steelwork.
- ☐ Review views, privacy and the relationship with the garden.
- ☐ Consider whether a smaller, better-planned extension could meet the brief.
- ☐ Decide whether the extension should match the house or form a deliberate contrast.

5. Plan the approvals

- ☐ Confirm whether the project needs planning permission, prior approval or a lawful development certificate.
- ☐ Check whether permitted development rights have been removed or restricted.
- ☐ Allow time for validation and the planning determination period.
- ☐ Confirm that Building Regulations approval will be required.
- ☐ Appoint a structural engineer at the appropriate design stage.
- ☐ Consider whether a build-over agreement may be needed.
- ☐ Check whether the Party Wall etc. Act may apply.
- ☐ Avoid ordering work or fixing a start date before the approval route is understood.

6. Prepare for contractor pricing

- ☐ Obtain coordinated architectural and structural information.
- ☐ Make sure all contractors price the same drawings and specification.

- ☐ Clarify what is included and excluded from each quotation.
- ☐ Check whether VAT is included.
- ☐ Ask for a clear construction programme.
- ☐ Confirm arrangements for temporary works, protection and making good.
- ☐ Review payment stages and variation procedures before work starts.
- ☐ Check insurance, references and relevant experience.
- ☐ Avoid choosing a contractor on price alone.

7. Questions for your first consultation

- ☐ What is the best way to improve this house?
- ☐ Is an extension necessary, or could internal reconfiguration solve the problem?
- ☐ What planning constraints apply?
- ☐ What is a realistic budget range?
- ☐ Which surveys or consultants are likely to be required?
- ☐ What information will be produced at each stage?
- ☐ How long is the complete process likely to take?
- ☐ Which decisions should be resolved before a planning submission?
- ☐ What are the main risks specific to this property?

Planning a house extension?

Hepburn Architects provides residential design, planning and Building Regulations services for extensions, renovations, loft conversions, new homes and small developments. Visit hepburnarchitects.net to arrange an initial consultation.

This checklist is general guidance and does not replace project-specific architectural, planning, structural, legal or cost advice.