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building solutions

are you thinking of improving your home?

the all-encompassing guide to home improvements:

what, when, why, how & who.



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welcome to this special guide...



Hello,

If you and your family have outgrown the space in your current home, there are generally three main ways to add more: buy a larger house, convert your loft or attic space into a room, or have an external extension built.

For many reasons, including good current location, mortgage restrictions or simply the added cost of a larger home, moving house may not be the right option for you.

And, whilst having a loft conversion room built is certainly most cost effective, it does not always provide a large enough space or in the right part of the house.

For those reasons and more, it may well be that the best course of action for you and your family is to have an extension built, giving you useable space that's focused entirely on your needs.

For many people, the thought of getting involved in all the potential red-tape issues, as well as the perceived hassle and mess of getting Builders in, is enough to put them off before they even start to look at the possible benefits.

But it needn't be like this, and with the right help and guidance you could have a dream extension designed and built to meet your specific needs, quickly, efficiently and cost effectively.

Which is exactly why we created this FREE guide!

At MoreBuild, we want to make sure you get the right information to ensure you can manage your extension project with confidence and get the most from the new space it will provide you.

That's why our guide has been created using many years of experience and valuable industry knowledge and contains only factual information to help you make an informed decision.

So, whatever type of house you have and whatever size of project you are considering, we hope you find our guide useful.

And of course, should you have any further questions, or require specific guidance in any area discussed, please call our experienced, friendly team on **0113 201 5030** or e-mail us at info@morebuild.co.uk and we'll be happy to help.

1. extensions



Extensions whether single or double storey or wrap around are the biggest improvement you can make to your home - in terms of structure, size, time and resource.

Most home extensions are the result of a growing family, whether new additions to a young family or older generations moving back in to be cared for under one roof. Which ever way you look at it fundamentally you are looking to achieve more space.

At this point you are often faced with 2 questions: move or improve?

A tricky question for sure. The trouble is yes it may appear easier to move, be less disruptive and cheaper. However you and your family are settled where you are, you have friends, know your neighbours, transport links, local schools, way to work - you have your routine and you're happy with it.

Moving also isn't as plane sailing as it first seem. Truth is you often spend 6 months minimum in limbo. What seems a relatively simple task incorporates looking for a new property - and one you see yourself living in, put an offer in, which may or may not be accepted.

If accepted you then have to apply for a mortgage, which has it limitations and wait for estate agent checks to be carried out all of which takes time and can fall down at any one point in the cycle. Not to mention the selling of your own home amidst everything else.

Nothing is concrete with moving homes until you have the keys in your hand which is why once you reach the other side makes this task one of the most stressful things you will ever do and the reason why we encourage people to strongly consider the pro's & con's of moving or improving.

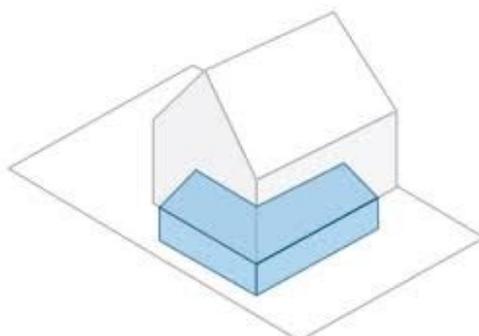
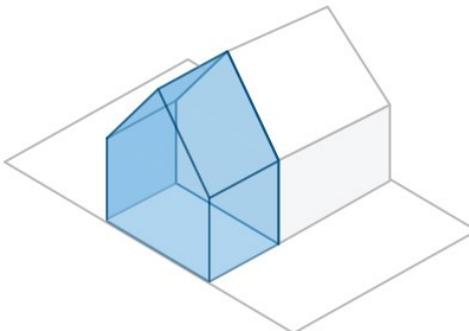
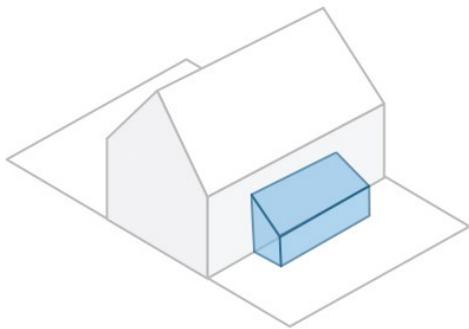
If it is decided to improve your home it is paramount to fully understand why you are wanting to create additional space and by doing so understand what you want to achieve. The bricks and cement create the shell but the internal improvements are the key - exchanging these 2 pearls of wisdom with your chosen builder will ensure your extension type is fit for purpose.

Principally there are 3 types of extensions that will allow you to achieve a number of different space creating outcomes:

single storey extensions - perfect for creating a second reception room / children's play room, downstairs bathroom or bedroom - especially important if the space is to create living quarters for an older relative, or to give you a larger kitchen and dining room area.

double / multi storey extensions - used increasingly to accommodate growing families, these extension types provide additional downstairs living space as well as more bedroom space upstairs, often resulting in a larger kitchen-dining area, play room, study, downstairs WC / cloakroom or second sitting room.

wrap around extension - an 'L' shape build to either the side /rear, or front/side of your property. Perhaps a change in working arrangements or lifestyle means that you require a home office, downstairs WC or second sitting room, or maybe even additional bathrooms and bedrooms on your ground floor in order to care for a loved one.



2. conversions



If additional space is your end goal you may also like to consider a conversation - the second biggest home improvement.

Conversations are typically suited to those looking to create an additional habitual room but already have the space suitable to house it i.e. a loft space, garage or basement. Typically these rooms are currently used as a storage solution that is not deemed as 'liveable' due to current building laws and regulations.

Similar to extensions having a solid understanding of what you need your conversion to achieve and communicating this with your chosen builder is key as each type of conversion suits different wants, needs and desires.

loft conversions

Loft conversions are principally the conversion of choice if you are looking to create an additional bedroom in your home. Perhaps you have a growing family and with the addition of a youngster you need the extra space for your children to have their own personal space as they grow up.

Maybe you have embarked on a new career path which results in you working from home. Loft conversions are a great home / office solution as they are out of sight - good for those times you are in and out of work mode.

Whatever the need providing there is 2.3 metres between the existing floor level and the highest point of your roof, then a loft conversion is a real possibility in your home.

garage conversions

Garage conversions are also a popular habitual space creating solution. Perfect for creating a second sitting room / cinema room, games room / children's play area, gym or downstairs bed & bathroom - perfect if you're looking into creating a home care set up for mum or dad.

Although deemed as an aspect of the house garage conversions are often classed as separate living facilities, away from the main home, meaning if you are looking to create a more personal space a garage conversion may be your conversion of choice.

basement conversions

Basement conversions are typically the least popular form of conversion and this is often due to what you want the new space to achieve. Although they are rarely converted into a habitual space a basement conversion is perfect for housing a separate laundry room, gym or simply a more accessible damp proof storage solution.

3. internal improvements

Internal home improvements refer to large scale refurbishment works inside the home typically in the form of a new kitchen, bathroom, bedroom or gas, central heating and electrical work.

More often than not each of these elements can be carried out by an independent specialist in 1 of 4 areas - which we would advise. However if your project requires an amount of building work like taking down dividing walls, creating a stud wall, creating new or additional door & window openings, relocating gas & water pipes etc. it is beneficial to go to a company that can take of the whole project.



kitchens

Kitchens are the focal point and heart of the family home and our modern, busy lifestyles mean that more than ever before, our kitchens need to adhere to a multi-purpose / multi-functional space that conveys your unique personality.

Typically large scale kitchen refurbishment works entail transforming a small, poorly designed and difficult to operate in space to an open plan, design led renovation that makes the most of your space and creates a layout that really works for your family and daily routine.

Within this it is anticipated there will be an amount of layout changes including electrical rewiring, gas pipe relocation and additional water supply measures. It is also possible to really open some space internal walls may be removed to provide a sweeping open plan design.



bathrooms

Whether a bespoke bathroom transformation, a stylish shower room conversion, additional en-suite / cloakroom or a future proof adaptation - design led inspiration is the key to this area of internal improvement.

Similar to grand kitchen refurbishment works this area of expertise may require a degree of supply changes depending on the level of work required. If you are planning on converting a bathroom to a shower room and want to switch the layout preparing and running a new water supply to this area is essential. Furthermore you may be looking to add a en-suite to your bedroom or a cloakroom to the ground level meaning a substantial amount of preparation and building work.



room extensions & conversions

Partly referenced above room extensions are a great way to make the most of your existing space. Incorporating the removal of dividing walls to open up your living space, room extensions are perfect for bringing light into darker areas of your home, making rooms appear bigger and less claustrophobic.

Room conversions address the need for change, you may need to adapt a room in your home to serve a new purpose and it's not uncommon for downstairs rooms to be converted to bedrooms or bathrooms once the stairs become a challenge for relatives who may now be living with you.

4. alterations & adaptations

Home alterations and adaptations are becoming increasingly more common as we strive for safe, independent living, within our own homes.

As a nation we are living longer and doing so healthier however as we age what was once a seemingly easy task becomes more difficult to manage and we are often putting ourselves at risk attempting to carry them out in an unsafe manner.

There are a number of alterations and adaptations that we suggest in order to make your home safe & practical in later life or accessible for a disabled family member.



bathroom solutions

One of the most important alterations you can make to your home to ensure safety and ease of use is in your bathroom. Outstandingly over 79% of all slips & falls among those 65+ occurs in the bathroom.

Fall preventative measures and ease of use solutions are the key whether that be a wet room / wet floor shower with seat, grab rail and vinyl flooring or an easy access walk-in or hydraulic lift operated bath.



kitchen solutions

There may be a number of reasons why the time has come to adapt your kitchen with design led solutions:

Cognitive conditions such as Alzheimer's or dementia may mean that a less cluttered environment is now needed - therefore storage is key.

Reduced mobility - perhaps additional handrails are necessary to increase movement around your kitchen or for wheelchair users the height of work surfaces and units maybe problematic meaning high/low height or adjustable height units would be beneficial/

Reduced grip - It's the little things, such as handles, taps and cooking appliances that make all the difference if you find that your ability to grip is weaker than it once was

Visual impairment - When it comes to fixtures and fittings, use of colours, textures and lighting can all make a significant difference to a person with poor eyesight.



access ramps

If you have mobility issues, access ramps can make a big difference to your ability to get in and out of your property safely, easily and independently, eliminating the steps to your front or back door, or from your gate or driveway to your home makes this hazard a thing of the past. For increased safety ensure your ramp is installed with fitted handrails, making them safe to use at all times.

4. alterations & adaptations cont.



door widening

Sometimes having limited mobility may result in using a wheelchair or walking aid for increased safety when on the move both in and outdoors.

In your own home this may cause issues when going from one room to the next with the added struggle of manoeuvring around doors and their frames.

Door widening refers to the alteration of the doors and in essence makes them wider however it may also refer to how the doors open whereby hinges can be changed to open in or out depending on which is most practical for ease of access.

A secondary option if the existing wall is unable to withstand a wider opening is to block up existing doorways and create new doorways in a more convenient location.



room conversions

Room conversions address the need for change, you may want or need to adapt a room in your home to serve a new purpose and it's not uncommon for downstairs rooms to be converted to bedrooms or bathrooms once the stairs become a challenge.

lift apertures

Lift apertures in a home allow for wheelchair dependent users to live in a house which occupies more than one floor. Similar to stair lifts, lift apertures are a vertical through floor lift solution that will enable you or a loved one to move from one floor to another in your home, safely and with ease.

Although some lifts are designed to carry a seated or standing passenger, most home lifts are now designed for wheelchair users, allowing the user to navigate your home without the need to transfer out of their wheelchair and onto, for example, a stair lift.



0% VAT

When it comes to home adaptations and alterations, there are Government endorsed HMRC VAT exempt schemes available. The 0% VAT scheme in relation to home adaptations and alterations, principally building works, is available on a certain number of solutions including:

- Access Ramps
- Hand & Grab Rails
- Door Widening
- Downstairs room conversions to facilitate easy access bathrooms, washroom's & WC's
- General building work to facilitate independent living

In order to qualify for the 0% VAT exemption you will be requested to fill out a simple form which would include detailing any physical conditions or disabilities such as arthritis or history of strokes. No doctor's notes are needed and no Occupational Therapist sign off / approval is required.



5. external improvements



Just important as the inside of our home is the impression our property gives on the outside - this is what people see first and perceptions and assumptions will be made on the internal building based on the external.

ground works

Ground works principally refer to the preparation of foundations to build upon as well as the installation of sufficient foundations in terms of depth, materials and earthling.

Secondary to this ground works also covers the installation of adequate drainage solutions, ensuring that all preparatory work fully meets the expected standards for a building control inspection. Not only is this a legal requirement ensuring these regulations are met will also ensure the turf you put down has the best bed to set in to flourish but will last for years to come.



fencing, decking & gates

Ensuring the rear of your property is not only secure but admirable to relax in in the summer months is the requirement of decking, fencing and gates.

Decking is a popular alternative to a lawn due to the wide spread availability - whether boarded or tiled, patio decking is an ideal solution for keeping your garden area looking immaculate at all times with minimal effort.

Fencing enables you to maintain some privacy while relaxing in your garden as well as helping to keep your property safe & secure. Similar to decking there are a number of styles available including, but not limited to, timber, posts, fencing rails and trellis panels.



Gates are an important and lasting feature giving first impression to all who visit your home. Depending on your preferred design, your gates also provide a degree of safety & privacy and with a huge range of options available, it is without doubt that you will get exactly what you want.

roofing, fascia's & soffits

Roofing installation, repair and maintenance is essential in order to preserve the appearance of your home and protect it against all weather conditions - the last thing you want is a leak due to a crack slate.



From slating & tiling pitched roofs and resurfacing flat roofs to the finishing touches of fascia's & soffits taking care of your home should start from the outside and work its way in.

driveways & block paving

Drive ways and block paving refers to a wider external landscaping project often resulting in a complete resurfacing service. There are a range of effects and surfaces available including blocks, flags, cobble or gravel allowing you to design your paths and driveway in keeping with the style of your home and garden.



doors & windows

Finally the choice and selection of doors & windows is extensive to say the least. From French doors, Softwood doors & PVC doors to composite windows, art deco windows, energy efficient windows & Roof lights / skylights. We suggest speaking with a specialist surveyor or designer who will provide guidance around the best option to complement your home improvements.

6. planning permission & permitted development

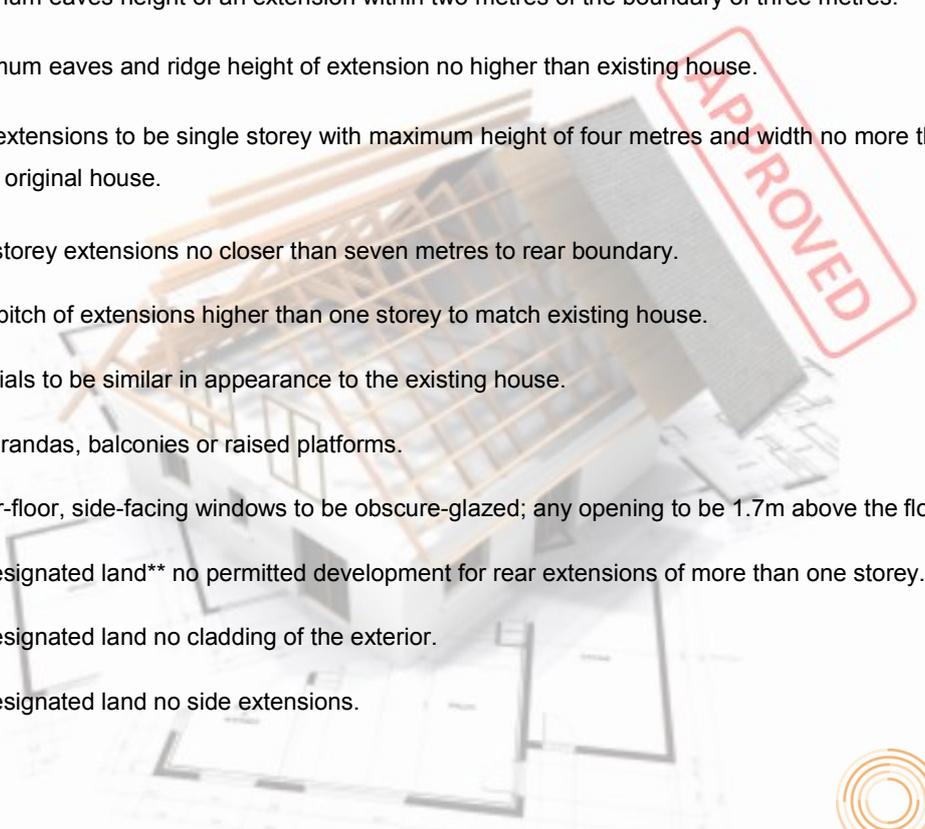
This is probably one of the biggest concerns for people who are considering any large scale home improvement project. When do you need to obtain planning and what do you need to obtain it for?

Typically planning permission only comes into play when considering a large scale extension project or specific conversion project but even then there are areas of exemption. Permitted development is a relatively new building law, referred to as a 'relaxed' version of planning permission.

extensions:

New laws introduced in October 2008 mean that in many cases, an extension or addition to your home is considered to be permitted development, not requiring an application for Planning Permission, subject to the following limits and conditions:

- No more than half the area of land around the "original house"* would be covered by additions or other buildings.
- No extension forward of the principal elevation or side elevation fronting a highway.
- No extension to be higher than the highest part of the roof.
- Maximum depth of a single-storey rear extension of three metres for an attached house and four metres for a detached house.
- Maximum height of a single-storey rear extension of four metres.
- Maximum depth of a rear extension of more than one storey of three metres including ground floor.
- Maximum eaves height of an extension within two metres of the boundary of three metres.
- Maximum eaves and ridge height of extension no higher than existing house.
- Side extensions to be single storey with maximum height of four metres and width no more than half that of the original house.
- Two-storey extensions no closer than seven metres to rear boundary.
- Roof pitch of extensions higher than one storey to match existing house.
- Materials to be similar in appearance to the existing house.
- No verandas, balconies or raised platforms.
- Upper-floor, side-facing windows to be obscure-glazed; any opening to be 1.7m above the floor.
- On designated land** no permitted development for rear extensions of more than one storey.
- On designated land no cladding of the exterior.
- On designated land no side extensions.



6. planning permission & permitted development (cont.)

*The term "original house" means the house as it was first built or as it stood on 1 July 1948 (if it was built before that date). Although you may not have built an extension to the house, a previous owner may have done so.

** Designated land includes national parks and the Broads, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, conservation areas and World Heritage Sites.

This means that for most people, their extension will only require Building Regulation approval via their local council, rather than full Planning Permission.

However, there are still cases where Full Planning Permission may be required and if your proposed extension does not meet with the previous limits and conditions, you will need to make a formal application to your local council before commencing work.

conversions.

Similarly, new laws introduced in October 2008 mean that in most cases, Full Planning Permission may not be required for loft, garage or basement conversions unless you intend to alter / extend the existing roof space to such a degree that it exceeds specific limits and conditions or you are transforming / changing a space that was previously non habitable to a habitable.

Instead, your proposed project may simply require Building Regulation approval or permitted development in order for the works to be approved.

But, there are still cases where Full Planning Permission may be required and if your proposed conversion project does not meet the limits and conditions set out, you will need to make a formal application to your local council before commencing work.

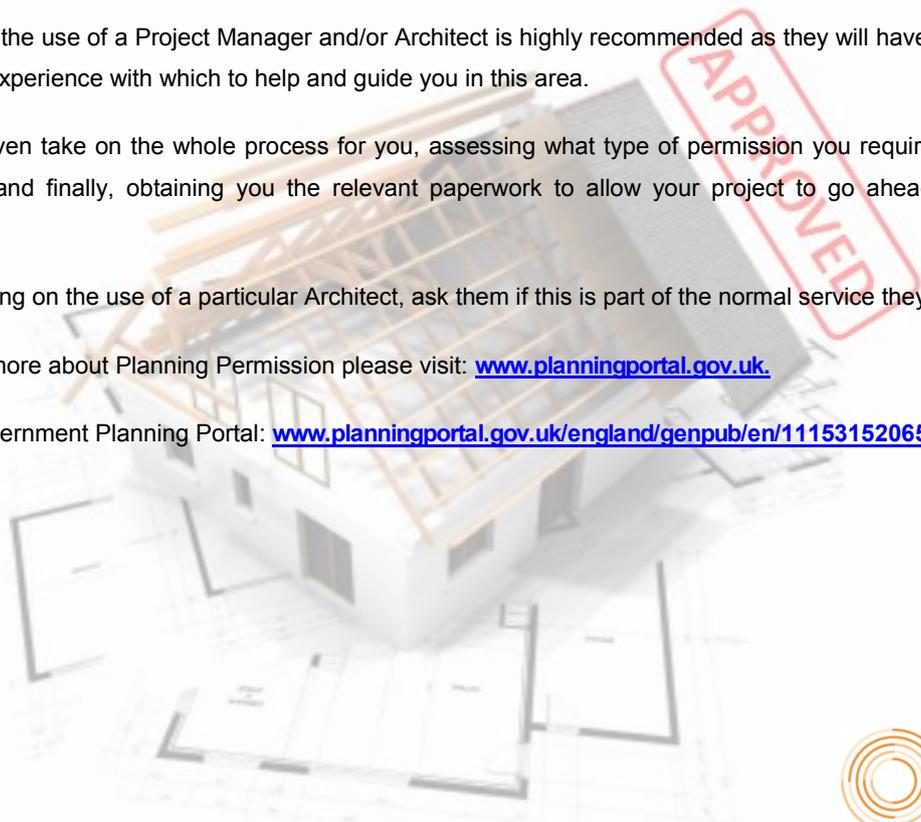
In all cases, the use of a Project Manager and/or Architect is highly recommended as they will have many years of relevant experience with which to help and guide you in this area.

Some will even take on the whole process for you, assessing what type of permission you require, submitting your plans and finally, obtaining you the relevant paperwork to allow your project to go ahead safely and compliantly.

When deciding on the use of a particular Architect, ask them if this is part of the normal service they provide.

To find out more about Planning Permission please visit: www.planningportal.gov.uk.

Source: Government Planning Portal: www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/genpub/en/1115315206517.html.



7. building regulations

As detailed in the previous chapter, a great number of people are likely to require only Building Regulation Approval in order to commence their home improvement project, instead of Full Planning Permission.

Building Regulation Approval is granted based on the acceptance and compliance of rules set out and enforced by the Building Control Department of your local council.

Whether Planning Approval is required or not Building Regulations will be required for all but the most minor of works.

Building Regulation Approval is granted based on the acceptance and compliance of rules set out and enforced by the Building Control Department of your local council.

These rules relate to many different areas of home improvements including, but not limited to:

- Flooring
- Foundations
- Walls below ground level
- Ventilation
- Energy efficiency
- Structural opening

The following common work sections give an indication of several other elements normally required to satisfy the requirements of the Regulations when building an extension or converting a non-habitable space:

- Doors and windows
- Drainage
- Electrics
- External walls
- Kitchens and bathrooms
- Internal walls
- Roofs

If you decide to work with an experienced Builder and/or Architect, they will have a good knowledge of the Building Regulations and can guide you on how they affect your proposed build.

As mentioned earlier, many good companies will take on the whole process for you, starting by visiting your property, listening to your needs, drawing up plans, having these approved in line with Building Regulations or Planning Permission and finally overseeing and managing the entire build process.

To find out more about Building Regulations please visit: www.planningportal.gov.uk.

Source: Government Planning Portal: www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/genpub/en/1115315206609.html.

8. party wall agreements

If you are thinking of having conversion works, the chances are, the Party Wall etc. Act 1996 will affect you and you may be required to obtain a Party Wall Agreement.

This is a separate piece of legislation with different requirements to the Building Regulations and it relates to party walls, excavation and construction within proximity to certain other buildings or structures.

Specifically this includes work which involves:

- Work on an existing wall shared with another property
- Building on the boundary with a neighbouring property
- Work involving excavating near a boundary

By obtaining a Party Wall Agreement you are notifying and obtaining acceptance from adjoining owners in order to proceed with your conversion project.

However, in certain circumstances, a simple letter from your neighbours may be sufficient proof that you have notified them of the work you intend to carry out.

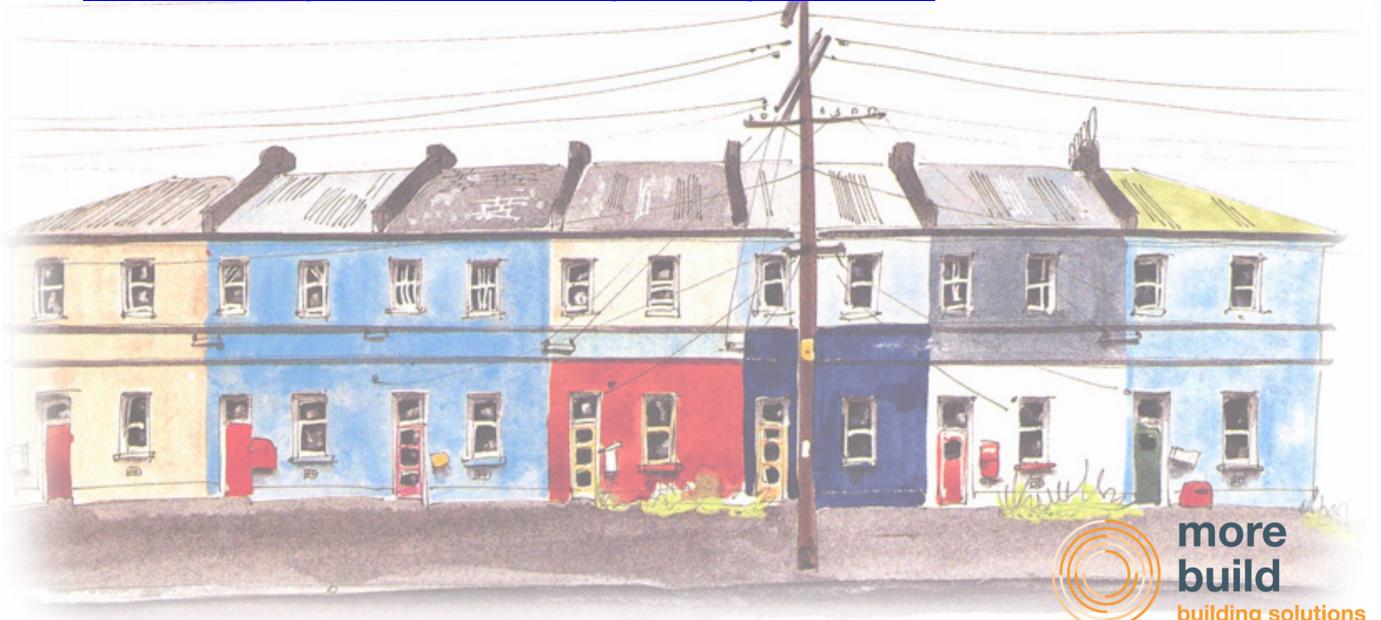
Once again, the services of an Architect can be used to identify whether or not you will need a Party Wall Agreement and if so, they can then help you obtain one.

In most cases, this Agreement can be sorted out with minimum fuss and without any concerns for all parties involved.

However, if the worst does happen and your neighbour is unhappy, it doesn't mean you can't continue with your build, but they have the right to employ a surveyor to consider their case, at your expense.

Likewise, you will need to do the same and to help with cost involved, it makes sense for you to instruct the same surveyor as your neighbour. Should this situation arise, advice and guidance should be readily available from your chosen Architect. For more information on the Party Wall Act please visit:

www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/133214.pdf



9. fire provisions

Within the Planning Permission or Building Regulations rules, there will be certain conditions and requirements relating directly to fire safety.

For obvious reasons these are of paramount importance and a great deal of planning will be needed to ensure these requirements are fully met when your design is first drafted.

The areas that are covered by the fire safety regulations include things such as:

fire / smoke alarms

A full mains operated system will be required, usually with a minimum of one alarm/detector on each floor of the house, rather than just in the new / improved room. Along with all the other electrical work, these should be installed by a registered electrician.

fire doors

The doors into and within the new / improved room will be required to conform to a certain standard with regards to the time they are expected to hold back a fire. Usually '30 minute' fire doors are specified with your Planning Permission or Building Regulation rules.

insulation

The insulation used throughout the new / improved room, be it for the floor, the ceilings or even the walls, will need to conform to certain fire proofing standards.

fire escape

A means of escape from in the event of fire will need to be provided within your new / improved room. Dependent on the usage, size and type of room you have, you may have to have a certain sized and positioned window for this, as well as providing an external roll-up ladder that can be used to climb down on rooms above ground level.

As with so much we have discussed so far, your Architect and chosen builder can assist you with guidance on your specific needs and requirements.

In addition, there are many companies that can provide you with a wide range of products and services relating to fire safety. However, if you employ a reputable building company, they will most likely be able to take care of all of this for you.

fire safety

10. adding value

Whilst the driving force behind your new home improvements will vary depending on the type of work you are undertaking consideration should still be given to ensuring that you are adding value to your home - especially on the larger projects.

Ultimately, all housing areas will have a 'ceiling' price and you need to be careful that you do not exceed that because if you decide to sell at a later date, you may well find that you are unable to recoup the cost of your works.

For that reason, it can be useful if you are having an extensions that once you have had your plans drawn up, to have a local estate agent provide you with a valuation as your property currently stands and also a valuation based having completed the works. This will give you a rough guide to the maximum you should consider spending in order to ensure it remains a sound investment as well as a valuable asset in terms of the added space.

All that said, if you're absolutely sure you will not be moving home for a considerable amount of time this is not as important; but it is still advisable to keep in mind the idea of adding value rather than just spending money - be wise how, when and why you invest.

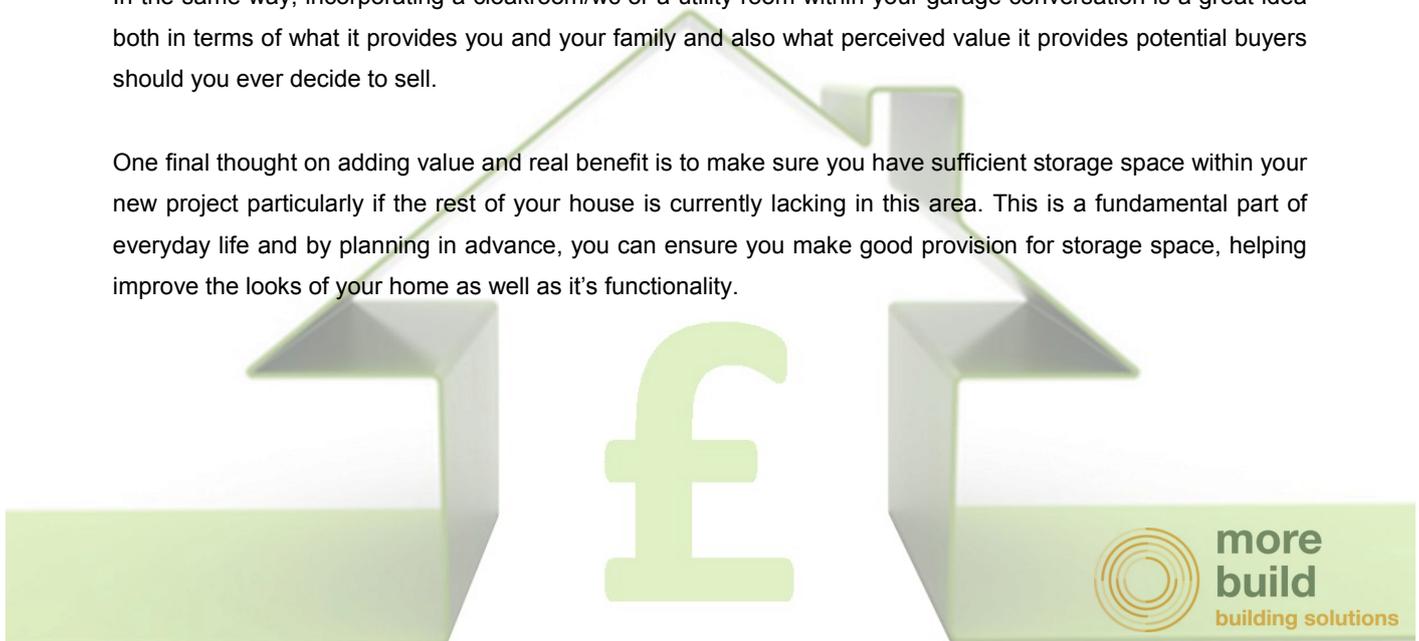
Similarly, when it comes to internal 'smaller' jobs, you should also ensure that the money spent is in keeping with the value of the house. Spending £30,000 on a bespoke fitted kitchen will no doubt provide you with a beautiful addition to your home, but if your house is valued at £150,000 it is likely your are over-spending and the amount will not be reflected in the increased value of your property

There are other ways that you can help add value to your property as well as improving the living experience for you and your family.

For example, if you are building an extension to add another bedroom, give consideration to including an en-suite bathroom or dressing room, both of which offer real benefits and help with future re-sale value.

In the same way, incorporating a cloakroom/wc or a utility room within your garage conversion is a great idea both in terms of what it provides you and your family and also what perceived value it provides potential buyers should you ever decide to sell.

One final thought on adding value and real benefit is to make sure you have sufficient storage space within your new project particularly if the rest of your house is currently lacking in this area. This is a fundamental part of everyday life and by planning in advance, you can ensure you make good provision for storage space, helping improve the looks of your home as well as it's functionality.



11. managing budgets - effectively

Probably one of the biggest tasks you'll set yourself during the whole project is to keep a tight rein on your budget, but this can prove easier said than done.

Each type of improvement work has an array of work to be carried out, with many items and materials to be purchased. This is the exciting bit and it is understandable how a project can end up costing a great deal more than planned.

But there are ways you can make sure you stay close to your initial budget, such as:

Make sure your Builder's proposal price includes everything

Whilst this may sound like a really obvious point, it is also one that can often be the cause of many money leaks.

So, always be sure to check if your proposal includes things like the cost of a skip and all associated cleaning up work; does it include making good any work required to the existing part of your property, are all the material costs included, and do they charge extra if they are delayed by weather and go over a set timescale?

Allow for a contingency fund with your budget

Another regular reason for peoples spend going way over budget is unforeseen building work that is only identified once your project is underway.

A good way to prepare for any such event is to 'build-in' a contingency fund within your budget just in case. So, if for example you decide your overall budget is £20,000, assume it's actually £19,000 right from the start and if problems are uncovered during the building phase, you have already set aside £1,000 to help pay for the extra work.

Choose a good Builder's Project Manager to help control your spend

An experienced Project Manager can make a real difference to your overall project and in particular, your budget.

This is because they can consult with you and your Builders throughout the various stages of your build. In turn this ensures that you know what's being spent when, on what and why.

More importantly, it means you'll be told as soon as there is a decision to make and as a result you can both decide the importance of the point at hand and also how much money to allocate to provide the most appropriate solution.

Most builders will employ their own Project Managers so check with them if this is part of the service.

Allocate your money on the basics first

It's very easy to get carried away with the nice parts of your project like fixtures and fittings, but you should allocate your money wisely on getting the basics right first so that you have a solid, well built & installed improvement that will last you for years.

It's all well and good it looking nice internally, but if your windows fail or your tiles let in water due to their lower quality, you'll end up spending a good deal more money at a later date to make repairs.

12. architects & project managers

It is true to say that whilst you do not need an Architect or a Builder's Project Manager to help you with your home improvement there are many good reasons why you should, especially for larger projects.

Firstly, both can save you a great deal of time, during any planning phases and the actual building phase and whilst it may be easy to think that you will have the time to take care of everything yourself, the reality is that in most cases, the workload is just too much on top of a full time job.

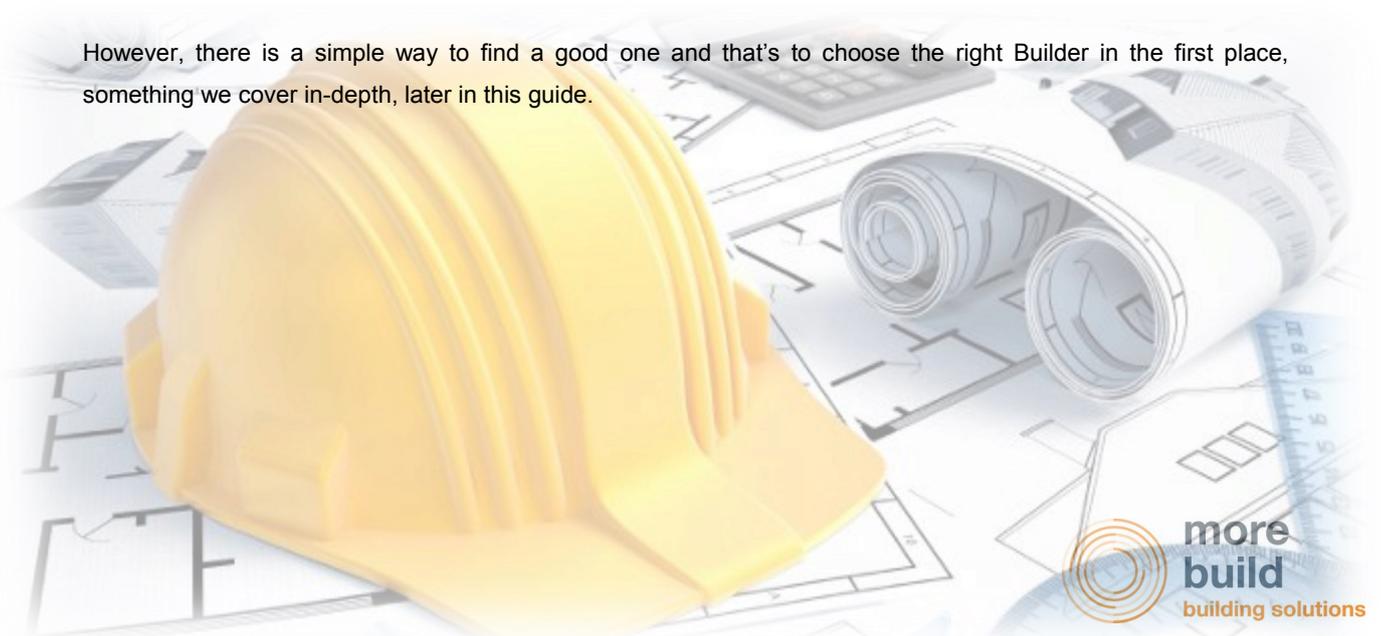
Secondly, they can save you money in array of project areas by simply cutting down on errors such as problems with designs, drawings, mistakes in ordering materials, or ordering the incorrect amounts.

When deciding which Architect to instruct, here are a few pointers to help you out:

1. Check if your prospective Architect is a member of RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) and has a relevant Architecture degree e.g. BA Hons DipArch.
2. Ideally get a recommendation from someone you know who has recently used an Architect and was pleased with their standard of work.
3. Make sure you speak to two or three different Architects about your project and try to pick the one that you feel is the clearest about your aims, your design style and your overall vision for the finished building.
4. Don't go straight for the cheapest. You should focus on the quality of service and overall design work they will provide you, rather than just what they charge. Ask to see previous drawings. Remember, your extension will be with you for many years and it will be well worth paying a little extra to get exactly what you want.

When it comes to a Builder's Project Manager, finding a good one can be more difficult because it's their planning, logistics and management skills that you're hiring, which means you have no real way of checking their standard of work unless you hear about it via a direct referral.

However, there is a simple way to find a good one and that's to choose the right Builder in the first place, something we cover in-depth, later in this guide.



13. choices

Getting the right company to execute your desired home improvement works is one of the single biggest decision you will have to make throughout the whole project.

Picking the right one can make the whole process run smoothly, efficiently and with the least amount of disruption for you and your family.

However, making the wrong choice could mean you waste thousands of pounds in materials and labour costs caused by bad workmanship, delays in supply or misinterpretations of your needs.

Worse still, you could find your project doesn't even get off the ground if the relevant Planning Permission or Building Regulations are not dealt with correctly - subject to improvement type*

So, how do you decide on which company to appoint as your builder?

Well, a good start is a referral. If you know of anyone that has had similar works completed and was happy with the job, that company would be worth approaching.

If not, here are some very important things you should find out about any prospective builders you are considering:

Are they members of the relevant associations?

The very best building companies producing exceptional quality work may be members of both The Federation of Master Builders (FMB) and the National Register of Warranted Builders (NRWB)

Can they provide testimonials and examples of their past work?

If other people have used them and found their work to be good and you can see some of their work for yourself, you're off to a good start.

Can they help with all aspects of your build project?

There are many specific areas covering an array of improvement types from the Planning Permission or Building Regulations, to main building work, roofing, electrics, plumbing, windows and gas installation work.

To eliminate having to find individual suppliers for each, an exceptional building company will be able to take care of all these needs, with fully trained and registered staff.

CHOICES

13. choices (cont.)

Can they provide you with your own dedicated Project Manager?

With so much to be done and so many things to potentially go wrong, especially with bigger jobs, you really need consider seeking help from a professional Project Manager who can oversee the whole build / works and help you stay in touch with what's happening. Many companies do employ their own Project Manager.

Do they employ all their staff and how qualified are they?

This is very important because although you'll probably deal with a Project manager at first, it's the actual builders themselves that determine how good your finished project will be.

You'll want to make sure the company you are considering employs their own specialist staff rather than contracting out for certain jobs and in addition that those companies are members of the relevant trade organisations. Below are a few of the trades that have their own governing associations:

- Window installers - **FENSA**
- Plumbing & heating - **APH**
- Gas installers - **CORGI, GAS SAFE**
- Electricians - **NIC EIC, ECA**

Do they require full payment upfront?

There are too many stories about honest people losing money to unscrupulous builders by paying out large sums of money upfront.

Most good builders will have a stage payment scheme in place so you pay as they work, or they may even take a deposit upfront, but then invoice you for the remaining amount after the job has been finished to your satisfaction.

If they're not confident enough in their work to operate a scheme similar to this, steer clear!

Do they fully guarantee all aspects of their work?

The single most important question you need to ask. After all, this is your dream project and one that requires a significant investment, so you'll want it to be perfect.

A good building company will genuinely care about you and the finished result and will go out of their way to make sure you are delighted with their work. And, if they're confident of being able to do that, there's no reason why they shouldn't offer a complete satisfaction guarantee.

Will I have a contract?

Most builders will give you a contract of some sort, however there are no regulations for this. Most reputable builders will use a simple 'plain English' contract, protecting both you and the building company.



final advice.

We truly hope this guide has given you some valuable information and has armed you with insider knowledge that will enable you to take on your home improvement project with confidence.

The whole process centres around getting good advice and guidance, doing a great deal of solid planning and working with dependable, reliable and trustworthy trades people that can deliver high quality results.

After that, it's down to you to enjoy the fun bits, like choosing the decoration, carpets, curtains and furnishings as well as dreaming of how much you'll enjoy the finished project.

So, good luck with your home improvement of choice and remember, if you have questions that have not been covered here, or if you would like to discuss the building of your project in greater detail, please contact us.

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