

Extensions and alterations to houses – a design guide



South Somerset District Council
2010

EXTENSIONS AND ALTERATIONS TO HOUSES – A DESIGN GUIDE

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This guide has been prepared to provide advice for homeowners, builders and designers about the factors to consider when planning extensions to houses. The aim is to lead readers through a decision making process that will help towards designing an extension that will satisfy both the needs of the homeowner and be appropriate for the building and its setting.

South Somerset District Council has prepared the guide as part of its commitment to improving the design and quality of development. Central government guidance and policy statements where a strong emphasis is placed on design quality underpin design policies in the South Somerset Local Development Framework. Retaining and enhancing the character of your house and its setting by sensitive design and choice of materials will also help to maintain its value.

What will require permission?

Council officers are available to give advice on what consents will be required but they will not be able to provide detailed design advice. You are recommended always to employ a competent designer, architect or surveyor to advise you about your ideas and to prepare the design drawings that you will require for your planning application.

Permitted Development

Some small extensions and alterations to houses, referred to as 'Permitted Development', do not require planning permission. It is always advisable to get confirmation in writing from the Planning Department that any works are considered to be Permitted Development before proceeding.

Planning Permission

When planning permission is required an application on a standard form, available from the Council, needs to be made describing the proposed works. This must be accompanied by scale drawings clearly showing the building as it exists and the alterations that are proposed. Photographs and a written explanation (a Design Statement) can help to describe what is proposed and what it will look like when completed.

Conservation Areas

For demolition of a building or structure in a conservation area, Conservation Area Consent will be required in addition to Planning Permission. Trees in conservation areas are protected. You are required to notify the council before carrying out any work to lop or remove any such tree.

Listed Building Consent

For listed buildings, listed building consent is required for extensions, internal and external alterations and demolition, in addition to the possible need of Planning Permission.

Building Regulations

In addition to any planning permissions that may be needed, Building Regulation Approval is also required for most building alterations and extensions. The council's Building Control Service will be able to provide detailed advice.

Consult your neighbours

A discussion with your neighbours about your ideas early on can help to avoid objections at the planning stage. Try to see their point of view and see if you can make changes that will address their concerns. Sometimes, with careful design, an extension can be a benefit to both sides of the fence, adding to privacy and shelter for both parties.

Preliminary study

Before starting a design, it is essential to have understood the character of your house and that of the neighbourhood and considered all of the constraints that will influence what you can achieve.

Look at local character

Understand the character of the house and its setting. Take a good look at the house and take a walk around the neighbourhood to look at:

- how neighbouring houses relate to each other and the spaces between them,
- how other houses have been extended and whether those extensions are successful,
- what building materials are used in your house and locally,
- what roof forms are common,
- what doors and windows are common.

Take photographs of the house and its neighbours to refer to assist you in considering the extension, to give inspiration and to help check that the extension will look appropriate. Make sure the architect or designer you employ takes note of these issues and understands that you require an extension that will enhance your property both in accommodation and appearance.

The principle constraints to consider are:

Neighbour's amenity

Extensions must not reduce the existing amenities of neighbours by overlooking or overshadowing.

Character of the area

The extension must be appropriate for the area. It should not be overly prominent in the street scene through being too large, upsetting the spacing between buildings, be of an uncharacteristic form or constructed of uncharacteristic materials.

Character of the house

Extensions must be in keeping with the character of the building; they must not dominate the building nor upset the balance of its original design.

Trees

Significant trees may be protected by Tree Preservation Orders and all trees in conservation areas are protected. If trees may be affected by your proposals check their status and take advice about how close building work may be possible without damaging the tree root system.

Vehicle access and road safety

A new or altered vehicle access will require specific planning permission.

Listed buildings

If the house itself is listed, Listed Building Consent will also be required for an extension. If any neighbouring properties are listed, their settings must not be harmed by your proposals. Advice on extensions to listed buildings should be sought from the Council at an early stage.

Conservation areas

In conservation areas high design standards and natural local materials will be expected. All development must *preserve or enhance* the character or appearance of the area.

Wildlife and biodiversity

Houses and gardens contribute hugely to wildlife conservation, providing sites for nesting and roosting, shelter and food. The wildlife interest of the garden should be considered when an extension is planned; both to ensure wildlife is not harmed during the works (which may also be illegal), and, ideally, to enhance wildlife interest.

- All species of bats are legally protected. If you are considering a loft conversion or any roof alteration and your house is older than 1946 you will be required to have a survey for bats carried out. *Contact Natural England Batline 0870 8339210*
- Swallows and house martins, commonly associated with buildings, have suffered major declines in numbers recently and should be protected and accommodated in any alterations.
- It is often possible to provide new roosting opportunities for birds and bats where there were none previously.

Detailed design issues

The following sections are intended to provide advice and guidance showing tried and tested principles that generally contribute to well-designed house extensions. They are not presented as requirements and, where planning permission is required, the planning officer's judgement of the particular situation will always form part of the decision-making. The illustrations indicate ways in which the design guidelines may be interpreted but they are not necessarily the only solutions.

Plot coverage

The extent that the original plot is taken up by an extension can have an impact upon the character of the area and the amenity of the neighbours and will be scrutinised carefully. Extensions that would occupy a major part of the garden or dwarf the original house will not be approved.

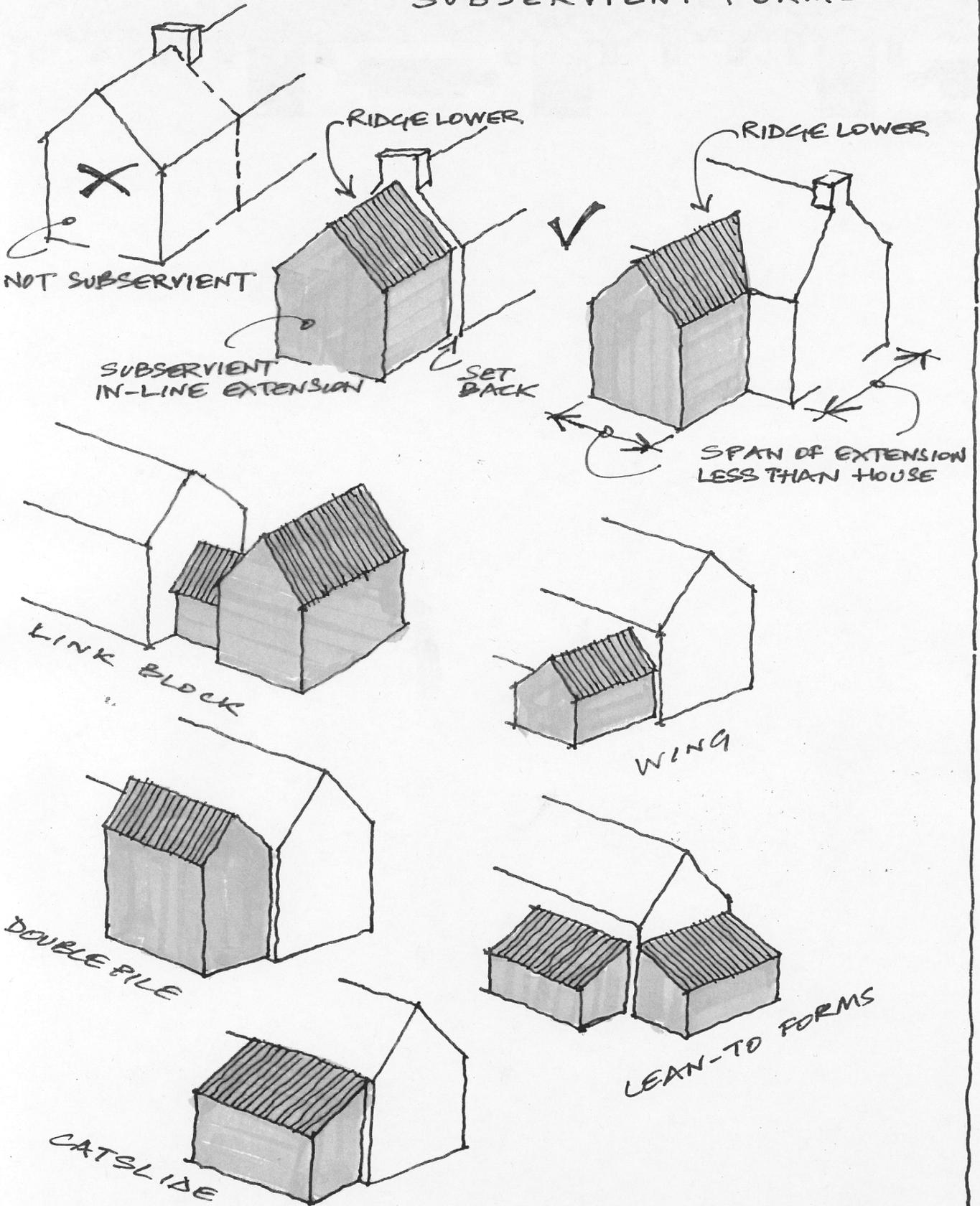
The context will partly determine what is possible particularly with side extension that will alter the spacing between houses.

Size, design and form

No extension should dominate the existing house in terms of size or shape. Extensions should generally be **subservient**, appearing as if they have a 'supporting role' to the existing house. Occasionally it may be agreed that it is appropriate to completely re-design a house, but usually an extension should read as a subservient addition. This usually means that it will be lower than the main house and expressed as a secondary, added element. This will require that

- the potential volume will be limited to a subservient proportion of the existing house's volume

SUBSERVIENT FORMS



- the eaves height will be the same or lower than the existing
- the roof ridge will be lower than the existing house
- the form will possess similar characteristics as the existing house, ie be in the same *family of forms*
- the roof will follow the principle characteristics of existing house roof
- it will be an *additive form* rather than a *subtractive form* (See diagram)

Front Extensions

- Always likely to be too prominent in the street scene and detrimental to the character of the area. Any extension more than a simple porch will generally not be encouraged.

Side extensions

- Should be set back behind the front face of the house
- May not be permitted if causes the removal of car parking spaces and/or forces parking into a more visually prominent location.
- May be detrimental to quality of the neighbourhood by infilling characteristic gaps between houses.

Rear extensions

- Usually the best location with the least impact upon the appearance of the house and character of the area.
- Apply 45 degree Code in order to limit the affect it will have upon neighbours
- As a general rule an extension should not cover more than half the garden.

Corner plots

Because two sides of the extension may be on view, particular care must be taken with a design for a corner location.

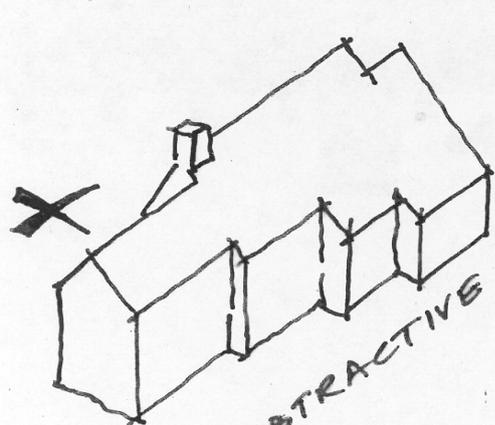
Overlooking and Overshadowing

The privacy and amenity of neighbouring houses can easily be intruded upon by poorly designed extensions. Any extension must be designed to minimise the neighbour's loss of sunlight and privacy and take account of the way it affects their outlook. These issues are particularly pertinent in narrow fronted terrace houses and the council may take the view that the capacity for extension of an existing house has already been reached and refuse an extension or further extension if it does not conform to the guidelines given here.

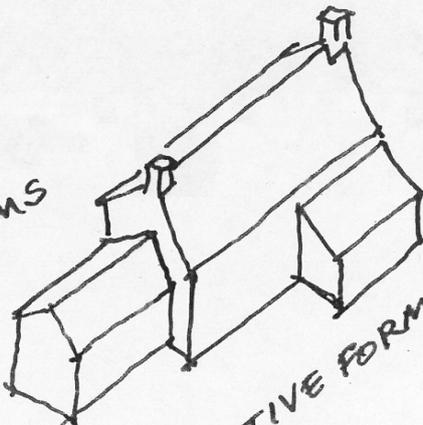
- Windows of habitable rooms should not overlook neighbour's windows. Normally the distance between a rear extension and the rear windows of a building backing onto the property should be a minimum of 20m.
- By careful design the windows in an extension can be arranged to minimise overlooking.
- The shading effect of your extension can impact upon the neighbour's house and garden – it should comply with the 45 degree code. The council will take account of the length of the garden and may refuse an extension that would occupy too much of the plot.

Roof form

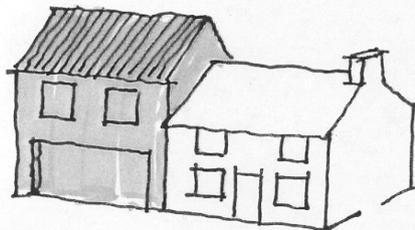
To help the extension tie in with the character of the house it is advisable to copy the roof details of the existing house. The roof pitch is a critical. Follow the angle of pitch exactly. Flat roofs are generally not appropriate, unless there is already a good precedent, if it is acting as an inconspicuous link or used as a deliberate and



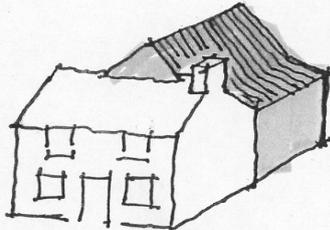
AVOID SUBTRACTIVE FORMS



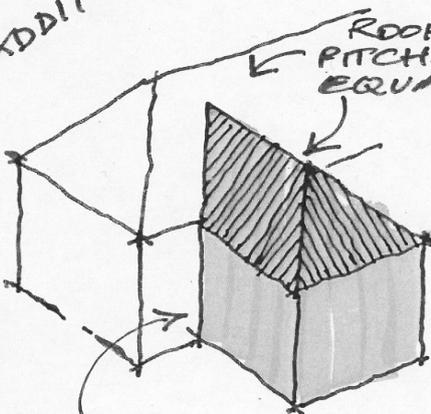
ADDITIVE FORMS ARE BETTER



TOO LARGE



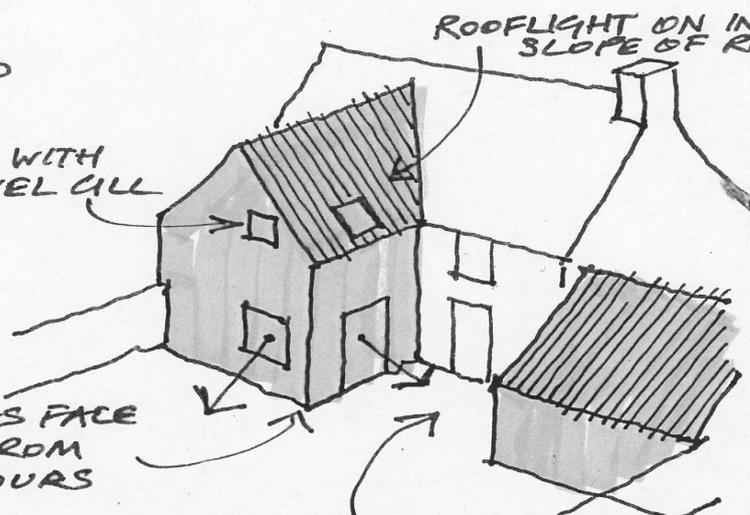
TOO BULKY



ROOF PITCHES EQUAL
ROOF FORM FOLLOWS THAT OF MAIN HOUSE
SAME FAMILY OF FORMS



DESIGN NOT RELATED TO HOUSE



CREATING AND MAINTAINING PRIVACY

WINDOW WITH HIGH LEVEL SILL

WINDOWS FACE AWAY FROM NEIGHBOURS

SET BACK GARAGE CREATES A PRIVATE AREA

The 45 Degree Code

The Code is intended for use in relation to extensions and new development that could have an effect upon neighbouring properties. It is particularly relevant to closely spaced detached or semi-detached houses or terrace situations and acts a guide as to what is acceptable. Its purpose is to achieve a reasonable balance between the interests and amenity of both the existing residents and the prospective development and to ensure that the outlook and daylight is not unreasonably impinged upon. The Code will not be imposed blindly and the planning officer's judgement will always have a part in any decision.

The Code will be applied from the nearest front or rear window of the adjacent residential accommodation. It will only apply to windows to habitable rooms or kitchens (bathrooms, hallways, landings, garages, conservatories and verandas are not counted as habitable rooms). If there is more than one window to the room that providing the main source of light will be used. The Code will not be applied to side windows even if these are the principle source of light to a habitable room but proposals that affect these will be considered on their own merits.

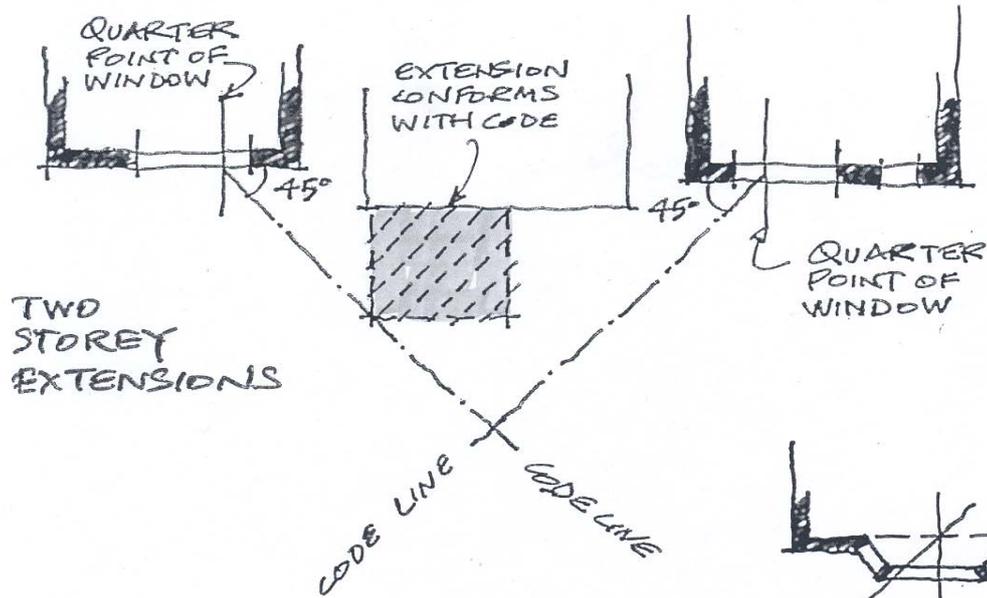
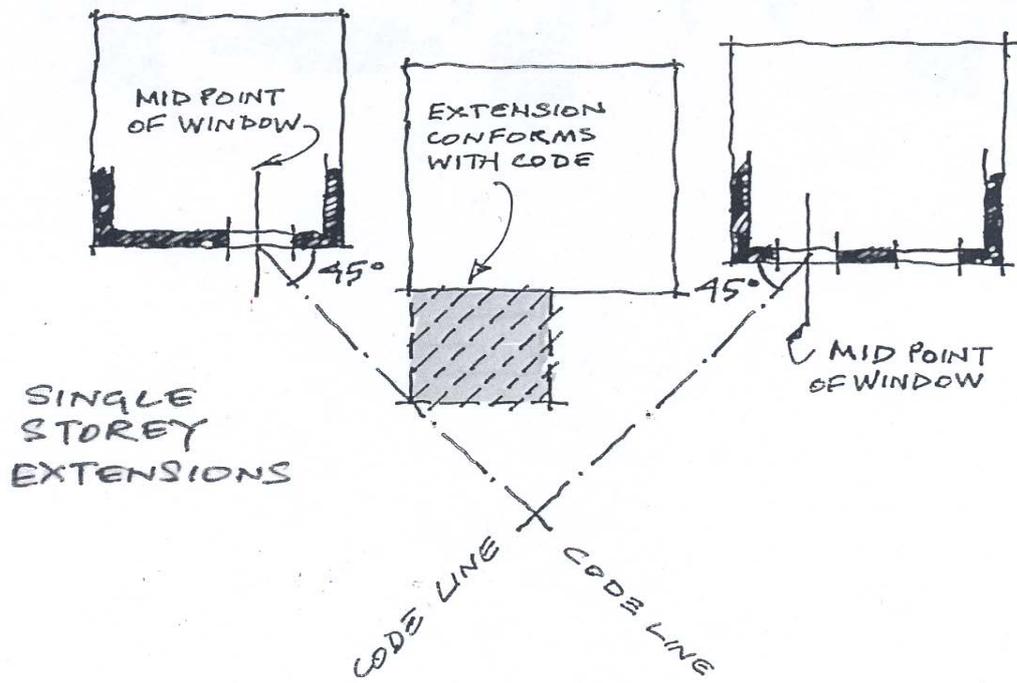
To comply with the Code extensions or new buildings must be designed not to cross the Code lines drawn at 45 degrees on plan from the centre of the nearest adjacent windows as shown in the diagrams. Note that the Code lines are drawn from the mid point of the window for single storey extensions and the quarter point of the window for two storey extensions.

The Code will apply to side extensions only where they extend beyond the front or rear elevation of the building.

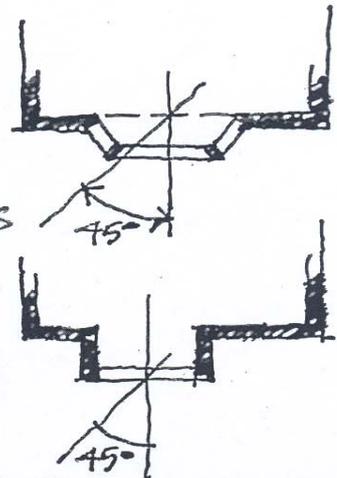
The affect of relative levels that could reduce (or increase) the impact upon amenity will be taken into account and the Code may, at the planning officer's discretion, be relaxed.

Joint proposals for extensions to two neighbouring houses for instance may be accepted at the discretion of the planning officer even though individually they may break the Code and provided that there is assurance in the form of a legal agreement that they will both be constructed together.

Note that the use of angled or stepped walls to comply with the Code will not be accepted unless conceived as a integral part of a well-designed scheme.



THE CODE LINES FROM BAY WINDOWS



THE 45 DEGREE CODE

appropriate design decision. The roof span of an extension should not be wider than that of the existing house.

Reproducing roof details such as eaves details & rainwater goods, gables, ridges and hips and other key features help the extension to really look like it is integral part of the house. Existing eaves, verge and guttering details should be copied as closely as possible in the extension to be in keeping with the character of the house and perhaps its neighbours.

Windows and doors

Windows and doors have a major impact upon the appearance of a building. Their location will partly be determined by the need for access and by the need to get light into the rooms but the location and spacing pattern of the windows and doors of the existing house and its neighbours will also guide your design. Be careful to avoid intrusive overlooking of neighbouring property.

It is usually most appropriate to copy the existing doors and windows; copy their size, material, construction, reveal depth, cill or threshold details, and their finish. It may not always be possible to obtain appropriate windows and doors from off-the-peg suppliers, it may be necessary to have purpose made windows and doors constructed. Joiners are readily available to make windows and doors to match at competitive prices.

Characteristic details

Incorporating characteristic details of the existing house, such as drip mould details over windows, exposed lintels, window bays, decorative brickwork, string courses or tile hanging, painted plinths or rounded corners, into the extension can really help it compliment the overall appearance of the house.

Materials

Generally it is best to use the same materials as those of the existing house as this will help the extension to be in keeping with the house and its setting. Careful design and justification will be needed if considering radically different materials to those of the house eg. timber frame with large areas of glazing.

Care needs to be taken with the junction of new and old materials; old and modern bricks are a different size and will not bond tidily together. A set-back between old and new can help disguise this problem.

Colour

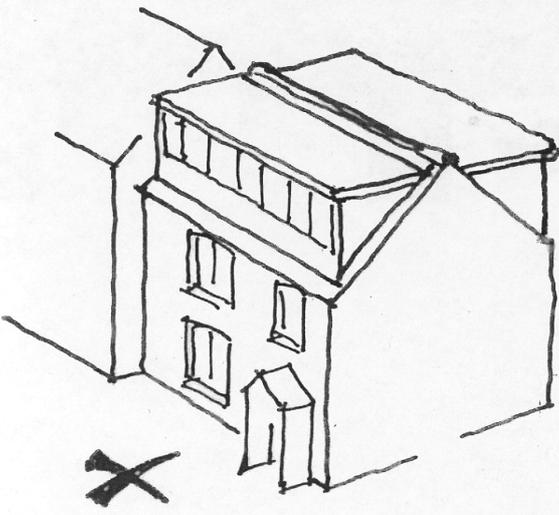
Building colour is an important contributor to local character and distinctiveness.

When painting walls you can make a positive contribution to this by selecting a colour typical of the area or of a locally common natural material like the stone used in older buildings.

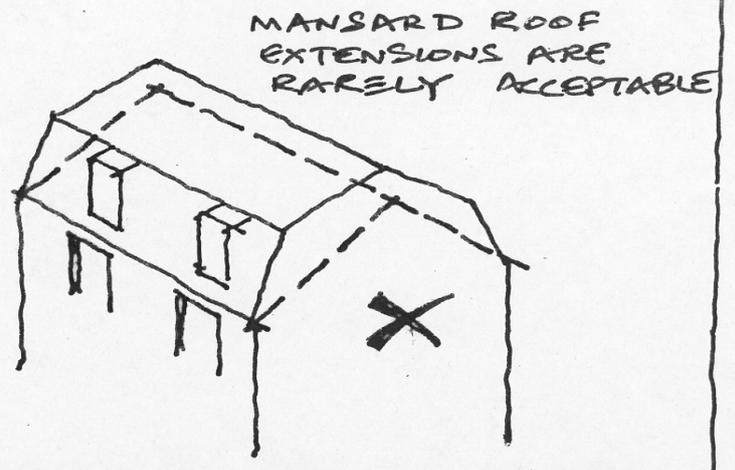
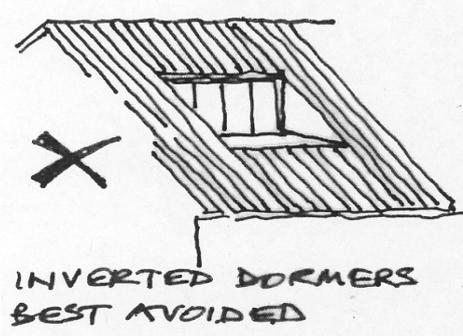
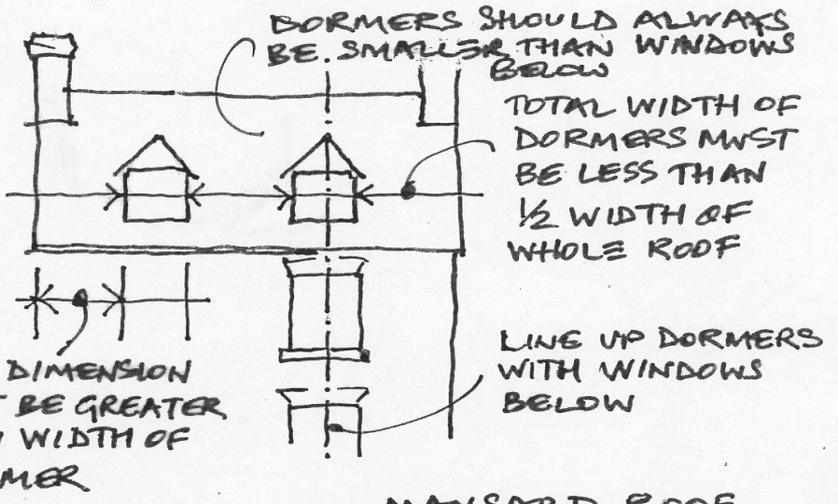
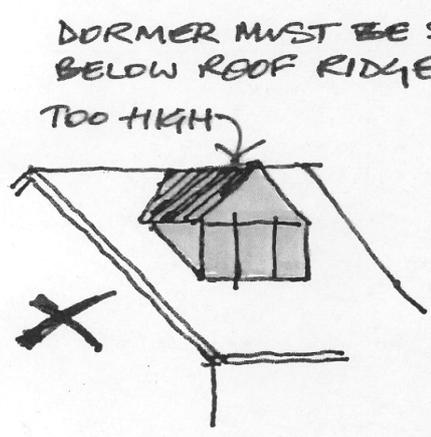
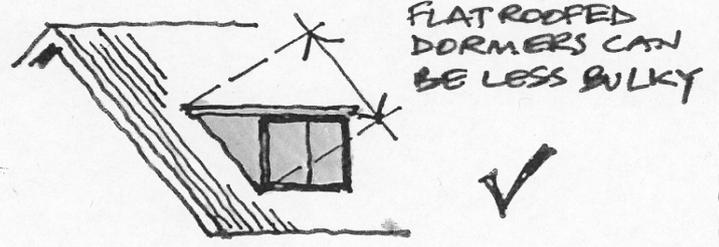
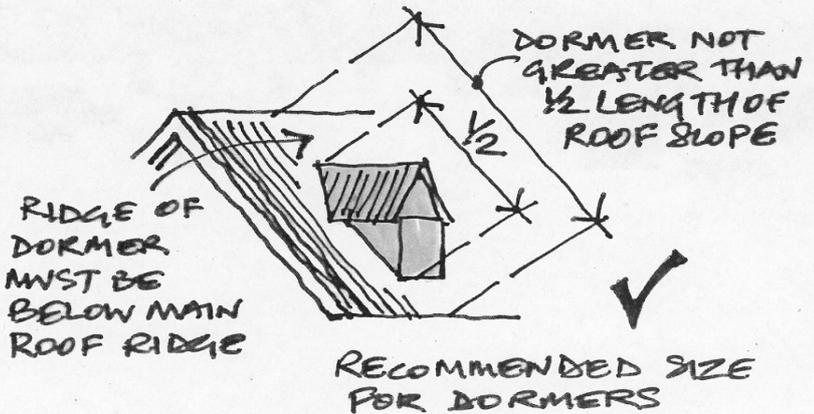
Loft extensions

When considering a loft extensions ask first

- Is there sufficient headroom?
- Will the ceiling structure need strengthening?
- Can you fit a staircase in?
- Can adequate fire escape provisions be incorporated?
- How can the work conform with Building Regulations?



BULKY FULL-WIDTH DORMERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED



Roof lights and dormer windows

- Dormers are only appropriate where they are characteristic features of the house or area.
- Dormers should not dominate the house. Observe the size guidelines shown in the diagrams.
- Traditionally detailed and proportioned dormer windows are preferable.
- Small traditionally detailed flat roofed dormers can be unobtrusive
- Bulky, full width and inverted roof dormers are very unlikely to be acceptable.
- Place roof lights on rear roof slopes to avoid detracting from the street scene.
- Conservation replica roof lights should be considered. These have less bulky frames, lie flush with the roof and are well proportioned.
- Mansard style extensions are rarely acceptable
- Avoid features that would overlook neighbouring property.

Garages

Garages, particularly double garages, can be bulky and take up a substantial part of the plot. They must be designed and sited carefully so that they do not dominate the house, intrude on the street scene or affect neighbour's amenity.

Garages must

- Be set back from front face of house by at least 1m
- Have a ridge height is lower than the house
- Have a roof pitch and design reflecting the existing house
- Match the materials of the house. (sometimes a darker colour can reduce visual impact)

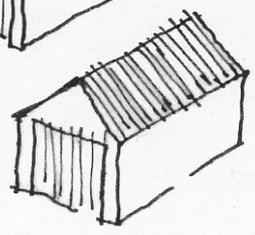
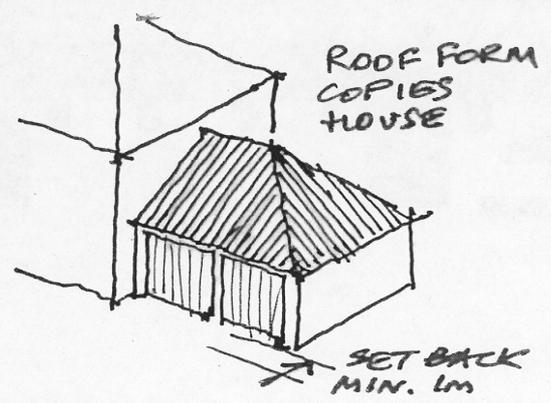
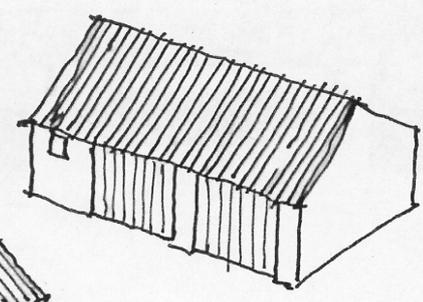
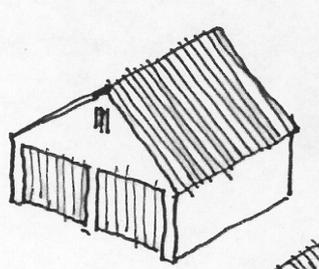
Consider a location to create privacy and shelter.

Porches

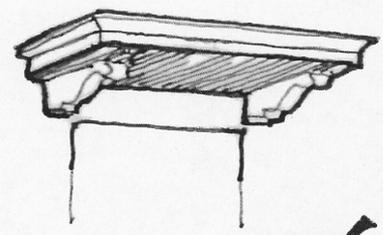
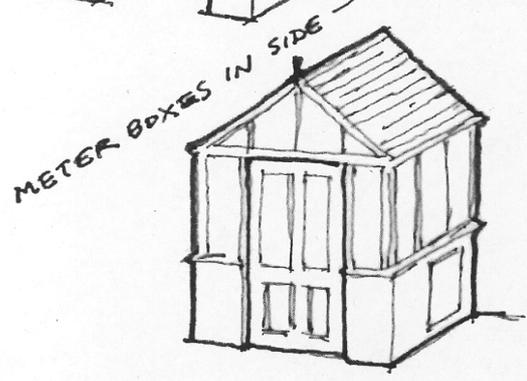
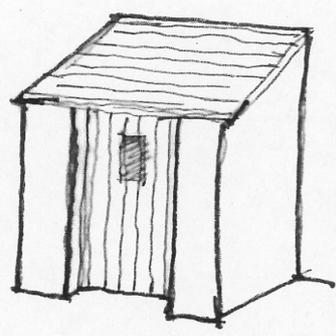
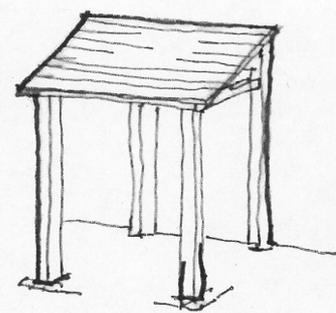
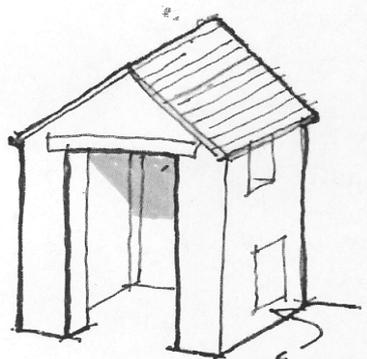
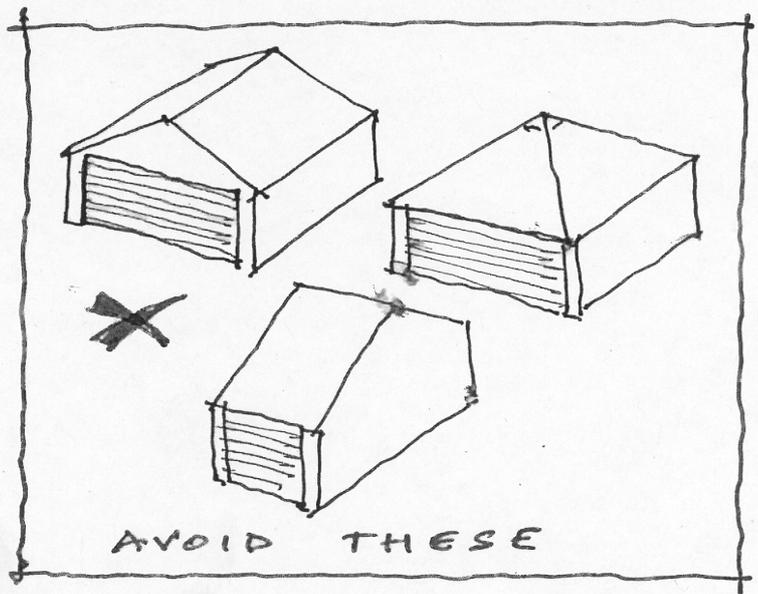
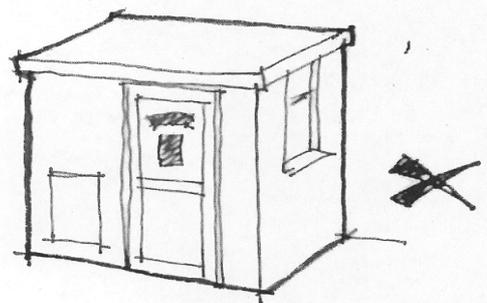
- Require a roof form, design and materials related to the existing house – use details to match those of the house such as eaves, verges door and window details
- Should not compromise the design uniformity of terraces or set piece groups of houses
- Must be of a size that does not dominate the existing house and does not obscure characteristic details of the house
- Should have a limited forward projection - maximum 2m
- Locate any meter box discretely – in a side wall or inside an open porch
- In some cases where an enclosed porch will be unacceptable a simple flat hood or a pent roof on wall brackets may be appropriate.

Conservatories

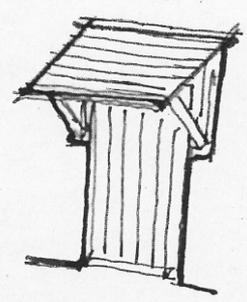
- Locate on the private side of the house only
- Choose a design style to suit the house - a simple form and style is often better than fancy shapes and details
- Ridge height should be no higher than the first floor window cills



GARAGE FORMS



PORCH FORMS



Balconies

A balcony should be introduced only if appropriate to the design of the house and the location does not impinge upon the privacy of adjacent houses or gardens.

Parking in front garden areas

In terrace situations where side parking is not possible and the front garden is the only possibility the following guidelines should be observed. Weigh up carefully the benefit of a parking space against the loss of a front garden and the possible affect this might have on the appearance and value of your house.

- Garden must be at least 6m long
- One car space only unless the plot is wider than 7m to avoid an overcrowded appearance
- Retain trees, sections of existing walling, gate piers etc to maintain partial enclosure of plot
- Introduce planting to compensate
- Use porous surfacing

In conservation areas or with listed buildings the removal of walls etc and formation of parking areas is unlikely to be approved.

Boundary treatment

The front boundary treatment of a house can make a major contribution to its character and that of the area around. The existence and sometimes uniformity of boundary walls, gates or hedges is often a major contributor to the character and quality of a street, the loss of which could affect the value of the house and quality of the neighbourhood. Changes need to be carefully considered especially in conservation areas. See advice on parking areas above.