



Planning Services  
Development Planning & Environment



PLANNING GUIDANCE (PG)  
House Extension & Alteration Design Guide

Adopted 9 October 2020

## Planning Guidance (PG) : House Extension & Alteration Design Guide

### Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Guidance (PG) is one of a series which supplements and supports the policies and proposals of the West Lothian Local Development Plan (LDP) which was adopted by West Lothian Council in September 2018. Of particular relevance is policy DES 1, "*Design Principles*" which seeks to encourage high quality developments and design.
- 1.2 If you are considering extending your home, you need to be aware of the effect that the extension might have on the character of the street or area it is part of, and any effect that it might have on the quality of life of your neighbours. An extension should be sympathetic to the appearance of the existing house and to the needs of your neighbours. If it's not well designed it can cause a loss of privacy, overshadow windows of a neighbouring property, or have a negative impact on the appearance of the street as a whole.
- 1.3 As a householder you have extensive *permitted development rights* under The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2011 (GPDO), which can allow you to build an extension without having to apply for planning permission. You should check the council's website or the *Government's guide* when you begin to plan your extension.
- 1.4 You will probably need a *building warrant*, regardless of whether you need planning permission.
- 1.5 Some works, such as the erection of a shed in your garden, might carry fire risk and should be sited carefully. If you would like advice on this, you should contact your local fire station.
- 1.6 Whether you need planning permission or not, this guide seeks to promote design that will protect and enhance the appearance of your house and neighbourhood, and the amenity of your neighbours. Following the design principles set out here will help to ensure that your extension will be sympathetic to your existing house and to the character of the local area.
- 1.7 We will reference this guidance when considering all householder planning applications, although as individual site characteristics must also be taken into account, and each case is different, compliance with these guidelines does not in itself guarantee that planning permission will be granted.
- 1.8 West Lothian Council encourages *good neighbour* attitudes and behaviour; we strongly advise that when considering an extension you speak with your neighbours as early as possible, take account of their concerns, and make every effort to agree a solution to any differences of opinion. There will be some occasions where a solution cannot be agreed; when this happens, the council will apply these guidelines and will come to a decision that is as fair and as reasonable as possible to all parties.

## General Principles

2.1 When a planning application for an extension is submitted, we will consider the following:

- 1 Design and materials;
- 2 Privacy and overlooking;
- 3 Daylight and overshadowing;
- 4 Building close to the boundary;
- 5 Useable private garden ground;
- 6 Parking; and
- 7 Sustainable design



2.2 Applications will also be judged against specific guidance for the particular type of development proposed:

- 8 Flooding;
- 9 Dormer extensions;
- 10 Front extensions;
- 11 Side extensions;
- 12 Rear extensions;
- 13 Garages, garden sheds/huts and other outbuildings;
- 14 Balconies, raised patios and decks;
- 15 Extensions to flats;
- 16 Fences and walls;
- 17 Ancillary residential accommodation;
- 18 Conservation Areas; and
- 19 Listed Buildings

2.3 The council encourages pre-application discussion of development proposals. Our [pre-application enquiry](#) service will give you a advice on your proposal, including any changes that could be made to improve it.

2.4 You should also have regard to the council's Residential Development Guide (RDG) <https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/20906/Supplementary-Guidance-Residential-Development-Guide/pdf/NewResidentialDevelopmentGuide-2019FINAL.pdf> which was adopted by the council in February 2019 and identifies requirements to be addressed by the developers of new build residential development, including having regard to proposals by future householders to extend their property.

### 1 Design and materials

2.5 Extensions and other alterations to dwellings should generally be designed as an integral part of the property and should reflect its character. They should not dominate the existing building or be designed in isolation solely to fit in a required amount of additional accommodation.

- 2.6 The extension should be of a scale that does not dominate the existing property or your neighbours' houses. It should be subsidiary in appearance to the main house and should not detract from the appearance of the dwelling or surroundings.
- 2.7 External walling and roofing materials should normally match those of the existing building. Where other materials are proposed, they should complement the existing dwelling.
- 2.8 The windows and doors should be of a similar style, appearance, material and proportion to those in the existing house.
- 2.9 Occasionally a proposed extension will be designed as a statement in itself, and will not necessarily relate in a traditional manner to the existing house. West Lothian Council is keen to promote good quality design solutions and will be open to interesting and innovative proposals. If you are considering such a proposal, we would strongly suggest that you submit a [pre-application enquiry](#) which will give you guidance on whether your proposal is likely to be supported.

## 2 Privacy and overlooking

- 2.10 Householders can expect to enjoy a reasonable level of privacy in their homes and should not be overlooked directly in their private gardens by the windows of another property. To control potential privacy problems, minimum distances are set for windows that face neighbouring houses. The minimum acceptable distance between windows of habitable rooms (e.g. bedrooms / living rooms / dining rooms etc.) which are directly facing each other is 18 metres. If the windows are at an angle to each other, the minimum distance can be reduced in accordance with Table 1. The windows of an extension should not directly overlook the private areas of a neighbouring garden.
- 2.11 Ground floor windows which are adequately screened (by fencing or a wall) to protect privacy or prevent overlooking can be closer to neighbouring properties than the distances shown on Table 1.

**Table 1: Minimum distance in metres between window openings**

		Angle (in degrees) at window of building to be erected not more than									
		90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0
Degree of angle at window of any other building not more than	90	18	18	18	18	13	9	6	4	3	2
	80	18	18	18	13	9	6	4	3	2	
	70	18	18	13	9	6	4	3	2		
	60	18	13	9	6	4	3	2			
	50	13	9	6	4	3	2				
	40	9	6	4	3	2					
	30	6	4	3	2						
	20	4	3	2							
	10	3	2								
	0	2									

**Notes:** 1. Angle means the horizontal angle between the shortest line joining any part of one window opening to any of the other and the vertical pane of the opening window; 2. Distances shall be interpreted for intermediate angles;

### 3 Sunlight / daylight and overshadowing

- 2.12 New extensions must respect the amenity of neighbours and particular care must be exercised to safeguard the natural light presently enjoyed by the occupants of adjoining residential properties.
- 2.13 Permission is likely to be refused if your proposed extension would lead to your neighbours suffering a significant loss of daylight to any 'habitable' room (this typically includes lounges, bedrooms and dining rooms but excludes halls, landings, bathrooms, kitchens without dining areas and utility rooms) and also where an extension might cast a shadow over those parts of a neighbouring garden which are more intensely used, for example patios. Impacts will be assessed on a case by case basis depending on site specific conditions.
- 2.14 The Building Research Establishment (BRE) Report – *Site Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice (BR209)* takes account of orientation and the tracking of the sun. It is widely used by local authorities to help determine the impacts of new development and the council applies the techniques it promotes to ensure that enough daylight/sunlight is achieved in or between buildings to achieve satisfactory interior and exterior conditions.

### 4 Building close to the boundary

- 2.15 If exercising 'permitted development' rights, i.e. building an extension that does not require planning permission, it is acknowledged that there is no legal prohibition to constructing it right up to your boundary. You should however be aware that if you choose to do this you may need access to your neighbour's land to build or maintain it. You will not, however, have a legal right to enter onto land that you don't own and you will have to obtain the owner's consent whenever this is necessary. It is worth bearing in mind that owners can change over time and may not always be as accommodating.
- 2.16 From a purely practical point of view building on the boundary may also mean that the only access to your rear garden may be through your house and with the attendant consequences for bin storage and removal of gardening refuse. Therefore, as a general rule, particularly when the council is able to exert control over such matter through a planning application, it is recommended that extensions are best set back from a mutual boundary by a margin of at least one metre to avoid such issues.

### 5 Useable private garden ground

- 2.17 *Permitted development rights* for houses allow you to extend extensively within your back garden, but when you plan an extension you should be careful not to overdevelop your plot. As well as leaving a limited amount of garden ground for your own family use, building over most of your rear garden might make it harder to sell your house when you want to move on.

## 6 Car parking

- 2.18 If an extension increases the number of bedrooms, the number of cars at that property might increase. This will be considered when we consider an application for an extension, and the application can be refused if insufficient parking is provided. As a guide, a house with up to three or bedrooms will need one off-street parking space, and larger houses will need two. In many cases it will be possible to increase the driveway width to six metres, which would allow two cars to be parked side by side.

## 7 Sustainable design

- 2.19 In accordance with The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and targets set by the Scottish government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 42% by 2020 and 80% by 2050, the council encourages the use of micro-renewables as valuable contributors to emission reduction. Where possible, extensions and alterations shall be designed to maximise the use of sustainable materials and micro-renewables in order to contribute to meeting these targets.
- 2.20 Should the site permit, extensions should be orientated to exploit the use of passive solar gain and designed to minimise exposure and heat loss. In all other respects, this entails the longest walls running from east to west, and habitable rooms being positioned to the south. The use of green or sedum roofing on flat roof extensions will be supported to minimise heat loss, reduce surface water run-off and encourage biodiversity.
- 2.21 Domestic wind turbines will in almost all cases require planning permission; deciding factors will be noise and visual intrusion; they should generally be positioned on the least conspicuous part of the roof and as far as possible from your neighbours' houses.
- 2.22 Solar panels require planning permission if they cover more than 30% of the visible roof plane or if they project more than one metre from the surface of the roof. There are no guidelines on positioning, except in the case of listed buildings or houses in conservation areas, where an inconspicuous location should be sought.
- 2.23 Heat pumps are usually considered to be permitted development, with the exception of air source heat pumps, which generally require planning permission. When making an application consideration should be given to the location of the pump to minimise noise and vibration levels for neighbouring properties. It would be advisable to consult with the Environmental Health service before submitting an application to ensure that you have sourced the most efficient and appropriate system for your property.

## 8 Flooding

- 2.24 With predicted climate changes the incidence and extent of flooding is likely to increase in the future and the role of sustainable flood risk management should also be recognised as an important climate change adaption measure. It is the responsibility of developers and the council to ensure that future development is not located on functional flood plains or in areas of significant flood risk.

2.25 In accordance with long established protocol the council works with SEPA to assess flood risk issues associated with new developments. SEPA is a statutory consultee for developments that are likely to result in a material increase in the number of buildings at risk of flooding.

2.26 When proposing alterations of extension to your property it is incumbent that you take flood risk into account before committing to a project. It can benefit to consult and liaise with the council's Flood Risk Management Team, Development Management, SEPA and Scottish Water.

Developers are also encouraged to have regard to the council's guidance on Flooding and Drainage and the Residential Development Guide.

2.27 Where the property is in an area that does not have a public sewer, and the extension involves additional bedrooms, applicants should confirm with the local SEPA office that any licence is not breached by an increase in the number of occupants. Where planning permission is required for the proposed alterations and/or extension confirmation of this should be submitted to the council alongside the planning application.

2.28 Helpful guidance on flooding and details of regulatory requirements and good practice advice for applicants can be found on the Regulation section of SEPA's website and:

<https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/land/planning/advice-for-planning-authorities/>

<https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/136130/sepa-standing-advice-for-planning-authorities-and-developers-on-development-management-consultations.pdf>

You can also contact SEPA at:

[waterpermitting@sepa.org.uk](mailto:waterpermitting@sepa.org.uk) or [wastepermitting@sepa.org.uk](mailto:wastepermitting@sepa.org.uk).

## Guidance on specific types of development

### 9 Dormer extensions

2.29 Because of their prominence, new dormers can have a major impact on the appearance of the property and the streetscene. As a result, modest individual dormers to the front of the property are more appropriate than large single box dormers. Dormers should not be so big that they dominate the roof.

2.30 Where more than one dormer is proposed on a single roof plane, the separation between the dormers should be carefully considered. Following the proportions and alignment of the window openings of the existing dwelling (see figure 1) is encouraged.

In general terms dormers should:

- (i) be well below the ridgeline of the existing roof;
- (ii) be drawn well back from the eaves;
- (iii) not extend the full width of the roof
- (iv) not extend right up to the gable end;
- (v) relate to windows and doors below in terms of character, proportion and alignment;
- (vi) match the materials of the existing roof; and
- (vii) have a front face which is predominantly glazed.

## **10 Front extensions**

- 2.31 Apart from small porches, extensions should not generally be built forward of the main building line of the property and should be avoided due to their impact and prominence on the streetscene.

## **11 Side extensions**

- 2.32 Since side extensions are usually visible from the street, care must be taken to ensure that the extension does not detract from the overall streetscene. Side extensions on corner plots are especially prominent and require particularly skillful handling.
- 2.33 Side extensions should not generally project in front of the principal elevation of the existing building. It is a good idea to set the extension back behind the building, even if only by the length of a brick, to create a "shadow" which hides the join between the old and new.
- 2.34 Two storey side extensions in particular must be designed to be subsidiary in appearance to the main house. Not only should the extension be set back from the building line of the main house, the ridge line of the extension should normally be lower than the ridge of the roof of the main house. Two storey extensions with flat roofs will not normally be permitted unless employed as a design solution. A two storey extension to a single storey house will rarely be acceptable.

## **12 Rear extensions**

- 2.35 Rear extensions have much less impact on the street scene than extensions to the front or side, but two storey rear extensions can cause overlooking problems and loss of daylight to neighbouring properties. Particular attention should be paid to issues of privacy, overlooking, and sunlight/daylight and overshadowing.
- 2.36 The use of a flat roof on a single storey extension can help in situations where overshadowing could be an issue. If you're considering a flat roof, we would strongly suggest using a 'green' or sedum roof, which has benefits for controlling water run-off and ecology.
- 2.37 Two storey rear extensions with flat roofs will not normally be permitted unless employed as a design solution. Ideally, the pitch and form of the extension roof should match that of the existing roof, although it is accepted that there are instances when this will not be possible. A two storey extension to a single storey house will rarely be acceptable.



### 13 Garages, garden sheds / huts and other outbuildings

- 2.38 The design and location of a proposed garage should be in harmony with the existing dwelling and surroundings; they should be located either at the side or rear of a house, providing that sufficient garden ground is available. A private driveway at least 6 metres long must be provided in front of the garage, and the garage doors and driveway gates must not open out over the road or public footpath. You do not only need planning permission for a new driveway unless you live on a classified road or in a flat.
- 2.39 Garden huts and other outbuildings should not extend in front of the established building line and should be positioned to ensure that the amenity of any neighbours' houses or gardens is protected.

### 14 Fences and walls

- 2.40 Fences and walls, particularly in front gardens, can have a significant effect on the appearance of the property and surroundings. When erected beside driveways or on the corner of the street, they can also have an impact on sightlines and traffic safety.
- 2.41 The maximum height of any gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure that can be built without planning permission is 2 metres. However, this reduces to 1 metre where the wall or fence fronts a road or comes forward of the principal elevation or side elevation nearest a road. Most houses are built so that the 'front' faces a road and is the part of the house that is seen by most members of the public. It will usually be designed to be the most important or 'principal elevation' and in the majority of cases is straightforward to identify. Once you have decided which is the principal elevation you will then be able to establish which are the rear and side elevations.
- 2.42 Fencing material should usually be timber, or in the case of a wall, a material that is sympathetic to and complements the established character of the property and the surrounding neighbourhood.

### 15 Balconies, raised patios and decking

- 2.43 As balconies and sun decks can offer direct panoramic views over adjoining properties and gardens, the residential amenity of neighbours can be severely affected. Applications will be assessed in terms of privacy, overlooking and overshadowing.
- 2.44 Decking should be located as near to ground level as possible; if it is less than half a metre above ground level is unlikely to require *planning permission*. Where sites are steeply sloping or any part of the floor of the decking will be more than half a metre above the ground planning permission will be required. In such cases the decking should not be located on or close to the boundary of your property.
- 2.45 Balconies, raised patios and sun decks will only be granted permission where there is no adverse effect on neighbouring properties because of overlooking of private amenity space, normally rear gardens.

## 16 Extensions to flats

- 2.46 Extensions to flats, such as four-in-a-block cottage flats and subdivided villas do not benefit from 'permitted development' rights and planning permission is therefore required for such works.
- 2.47 Flats pose particular difficulties because of the proximity of neighbouring properties and the complexity of property ownership. There is often concern about gaining access to upper floor windows for cleaning or repair, and while these are not material planning considerations, in the interests of good neighbour relations, applicants are advised to seek the agreement of all common owners prior to implementing any such works.

## 17 Ancillary residential accommodation

- 2.48 Ancillary accommodation for elderly dependents, teenagers or other close relatives can be attached or detached from the main dwelling house, and will normally share the garden, parking and bin storage arrangements of the main house. Such accommodation shall be assessed as a house extension in terms of garden space and parking provision. Linked residential accommodation of this sort must not be used as separate accommodation, and if consent is granted it will be controlled by conditions which will prevent the annex being let or sold as a separate dwelling.

## 18 Conservation areas

- 2.49 These are defined by the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as areas of special architectural interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The GPDO removes permitted development rights for virtually all extensions in a *conservation area*. An extension to a house or a new outbuilding in or affecting the setting of a Conservation Area must be sensitively designed to ensure that it does not adversely affect the special character of the area. The building materials must be carefully chosen to match or at least complement those of the main building. *Conservation Area Consent* is required if a proposed alteration involves the demolition of any building or structure in a conservation area.

## 19 Listed buildings

- 2.50 A *Listed Building* is defined by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as a building of architectural or historic interest. The GPDO removes permitted development rights for virtually all extensions to a listed building, but a separate permission, *Listed Building Consent*, will be required for any extensions and alterations to a Listed Building (both internal and external) or to buildings or structures in its curtilage, which affect the character or setting of the listed building. Extensions to Listed Buildings or new outbuildings within the curtilage must be sensitively designed and of the highest quality. An application to extend a house that is listed should be accompanied by clear information to show the full implications of the extension and alterations to the fabric and character of the building.

## (PG) House Extension & Alteration Design Guide

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