

# Householder's Guide: Design of Extensions and Alterations

Supplementary Planning Document



Consultation draft  
October 2023

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*\* **Front cover images:** Exeter has a rich and varied palette of existing materials and construction techniques that create a distinctive character and help to establish a strong sense of place*

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Householders' planning applications make up around 20 to 30 per cent of the total dealt with by the City Development team at Exeter City Council. Our planning officers have a responsibility to ensure that proposals do not harm the living conditions of neighbours and that through good design, they have a positive impact on Exeter's environment and its streetscapes.
- 1.2 This guide sets out in a clear and structured way the principles that will enable your planning application for changes to your house to be approved. It is also a valuable tool to ensure design quality in the city.
- 1.3 This document is principally designed for applicants submitting planning applications. If you are applying for Listed Building Consent (LBC), which is required when making internal and external alterations to a listed building, we recommend you seek further advice from the City Development team.

### Permitted development

- 1.4 'Permitted development rights' enable certain extensions, alterations, and outbuildings to be constructed without planning permission. The allowances and limits provided by permitted development rights are set nationally. The [Planning Portal](#) website provides a wealth of information including an interactive tool that gives clear guidance on what you can do to your house without the need for planning permission, it also sets out the limitations of this.
- 1.5 Not all dwellings have permitted development rights. It is important that this is checked and understood when you are intending to make alterations to your house, to ensure the works are lawful. Flats do not benefit from permitted development rights. Whether your house has permitted development rights will depend on the history of the building, its location and whether it is listed. In some parts of Exeter, the permitted development rights have been removed or restricted to protect the local character.
- 1.6 For further information, visit: [Do I need planning permission? - Exeter City Council](#).

### Pre-application advice

- 1.7 Exeter City Council offers a pre-application advice service to householders considering an extension or alterations to their property or a property not yet owned. The aim is to allow planning officers to identify any problems in advance and suggest changes to increase the likelihood of planning approval.
- 1.8 For further information and to submit a pre-application enquiry online, visit: [Planning pre-app advice - Exeter City Council](#).

### Building Regulations

- 1.9 Irrespective of whether or not you require planning permission, you may need separate Building Regulation approval. We advise early contact with Exeter City Council Building Control to establish likely requirements, costs and timescales.
- 1.10 For further information, visit [Building regulation approval - Exeter City Council](#).

## External works

- 1.11 External works such as pergolas, decking, patios, boundary walls or fences often require planning permission. Please use the [Planning Portal interactive tool](#) as a guide to determine if planning permission is required. Or refer to the Planning Portal's common project guide to find out more about your proposed project: [Common projects - Planning Portal](#)
- 1.12 It is considered that boundaries, such as fences and walls, should be carefully designed to contribute to the local distinctiveness of the area. See Section 8 for further advice on boundaries.

## Sustainability

- 1.13 The City Council has declared a Climate Emergency and pledged to work towards creating a carbon-neutral city by 2030. We have adopted the [Net Zero Exeter 2030 Plan](#), which sets out what Exeter will need to put in place to be net-zero carbon by 2030.
- 1.14 Building an extension is an opportunity to improve your home's environmental impact. We will give merit to proposals that enhance environmental performance.
- 1.15 For information on home energy generation and common micro-renewable energy projects such as solar and photovoltaic panels, micro-wind turbines, heat pumps and biomass technology, visit the [Planning Portal](#).
- 1.16 The Energy Saving Trust can provide further information about ways to reduce energy use at home: [Energy advice for your home - Energy Saving Trust](#).

## Crime prevention

- 1.17 It is essential to consider the impact that your proposal may have on the security of the original house and the neighbouring properties at an early stage. Security measures should be unobtrusive and designed as an integral part of the overall proposal. Opportunities to break in, such as drainpipes and flat roofs providing easy access to first-floor windows, should be avoided. Front doors should be visible from the street to prevent potential intruders from being hidden from view. Good natural surveillance from within the property should also be provided.
- 1.18 Security advice can be sought from Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. For further information visit: [Protecting your home from crime | Crime prevention | Devon & Cornwall Police \(devon-cornwall.police.uk\)](#)

## Planning applications

- 1.19 Planning applications are made by submitting forms, specific plans and annotated drawings drawn to scale, any other supporting information and documentation necessary to process the application. The requirements to ensure that an application is valid can be found here: [Apply for planning permission and other consents - Exeter City Council](#).

- 1.20 When submitting a planning application, in most cases there will be a fee to be paid. A missing or incorrect fee will delay the processing of your application. The Planning Portal keeps an up to date list of fees and provides a fee calculator tool: [What it costs - How to apply - Planning Portal](#).
- 1.21 **Consulting neighbours:** Applicants are advised to talk to neighbours to explain their proposals before submitting a planning application. Consulting neighbours at an early stage can ease the formal consultation process that will follow and therefore save time and expense later on by avoiding the need for plans to be revised.
- 1.22 **Changing proposals:** A new application is likely to be required for changes to an approved design if it will result in different dimensions, external appearance or materials. Please submit revised plans to us and we can advise if the changes would be considered a 'non-material amendment' or require a new planning application.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1 This guide is one of a series of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that provide more detailed advice on planning policies. This Householder's Guide: Design of Extensions and Alterations SPD amplifies current Local Plan First Review 1995-2011 design guidance policies DG1 and DG4 (see box for policy wording) and, together with the [National Planning Policy Framework](#), forms the basis for Exeter City Council's determination of planning applications. The objective of the Local Plan First Review 1995-2011 design guidance policies is to promote good design in all development proposals.
- 2.2 This Householder's Guide: Design of Extensions and Alterations SPD is likely to need updating once the emerging Exeter Plan, the new Local Plan for Exeter, is adopted.
- 2.3 This SPD provides further advice on the design of householder extensions and alterations as these, individually and cumulatively, can significantly impact townscape and living conditions for neighbours. No proposal is too small to have an impact, and Exeter City Council requires all applications to achieve high standards of design and living conditions. Applicants are advised to appoint an architect or other appropriately qualified professional to carry out the design work.
- 2.4 Many places and streets in Exeter are designated as 'conservation areas', where additional policy and legal protection exists to help conserve and enhance the character and appearance of these historic areas.
- 2.5 There are also a number of well-designed areas of housing within the city that have a strong, distinct character, which include designed open amenity areas and public spaces. Examples include the post war housing around Wonford including Burnthouse Lane and Rifford Road areas, and newer developments at Gras Lawn and Wyvern Barracks either side of Barrack Road. These unique characteristics should be protected, and further guidance is provided in this document.

## Exeter Local Plan First Review 1995-2011: Design guidance policies

### **Policy DG1:** Development should

- a) Be compatible with the urban structure of the city, connecting effectively with existing routes and spaces and putting people before traffic;
- b) Ensure that the pattern of street blocks, plots and their buildings (the grain of development) promotes the urban character of Exeter;
- c) Fully integrate landscape design into the proposal and ensure that schemes are integrated into the existing landscape of the city, including its three-dimensional shape, natural features and ecology;
- d) Be at a density that promotes Exeter's urban character and which supports urban services;
- e) Contribute to the provision of a compatible mix of uses that work together to create vital and viable places;
- f) Be of a height that is appropriate to the surrounding townscape and ensure that the height of constituent parts of buildings relate well to adjoining buildings, spaces and human scale;
- g) Ensure that the volume and shape (the massing) of structures relate well to the character and appearance of the adjoining buildings and the surrounding townscape;
- h) Ensure that all designs promote local distinctiveness and contribute positively to the visual richness and amenity of the townscape;
- i) Use materials that relate well to the palette of materials in the locality and reinforce local distinctiveness.

## Exeter Local Plan First Review 1995-2011: Design guidance policies

### **Policy DG4:** Residential development should:

- a) Be at the maximum feasible density taking into account site constraints and impact on the local area;
- b) Ensure a quality of amenity which allows residents to feel at ease within their homes and gardens;
- c) Ensure that the boundaries of private rear gardens facing public places are designed to make a positive contribution to the townscape;
- d) Where front gardens are included, provide enclosure to create defensible space.

## 3. General Principles

- 3.1 All extensions should follow the twelve General Principles and additional guidance in this section.
- 3.2 Further specific advice relating to particular types of extension can be found in separate chapters. Planning applications which follow the General Principles outlined in this document will generally be successful, and the time taken to achieve a consent will be minimised.

### General Principles

#### 1. Use

Extensions should not be designed or used as separate residential units or businesses.

#### 2. Street scene

Extensions should respect existing building lines, the pattern of buildings in the street and the spaces between them. Extensions should not project forward of the front main building line, nor cause terracing\* or contribute to creating terracing.

*\*Terracing refers to two-storey side extensions which result in an unacceptable reduction in width or total loss of the gap between properties - creating the impression of a continuous building frontage.*

#### 3. Natural light and outlook

Extensions should not adversely affect the natural light and outlook enjoyed by neighbours.

#### 4. Privacy

Extensions should be designed to minimise overlooking into neighbouring properties.

#### 5. Scale and massing

Extensions should be subservient\* to the original house and be carefully composed with sympathetic proportions.

*\*Subservience means that the size and proportion of an extension allows the main house to remain the dominant feature.*

#### 6. Roofs

Roofs should match the main roof in terms of shape, pitch and materials. The ridges or the highest rooflines should be set lower, and the eaves-line should be no higher than that of the main roof.

#### 7. Architectural details

Architectural details of the main building should be protected and repeated in the extension design.

#### 8. Materials

Exterior materials, and the way they are used (e.g. coursing and pointing, jointing and fixing), should generally match the original house.

## General Principles

### 9. Garden Space

Proposals should normally ensure that 55 square metres of private useable garden space\* remain after construction. Where gardens are currently less than 55 square metres, an extension may not be permitted.

*\* 'Useable garden space' is land under the occupier's exclusive control within the dwellinghouse's curtilage. It only includes land that has been adequately screened, usually to the rear and side of the property, and excludes driveways. The minimum area is generally 55 square metres, please see Chapter 7 of the [Residential Design Guide SPD - Exeter City Council](#) for a full explanation of the requirements. The area may reduce for smaller dwellings but might need to increase for gardens with poor orientation.*

### 10. Integrated design

All elements of the proposal, including landscape works, bin and bicycle storage and security, should be considered and designed as part of the overall scheme from the outset.

### 11. Landscape

Extensions should be designed to minimise the impact upon existing soft and hard landscape features that positively contribute to local character, biodiversity and appearance e.g. mature planting, trees, and boundary treatments.

### 12. Security

The security of the extended and adjoining properties should not be prejudiced by the design of extensions. Security measures should not harm the established character of the street and the original house.

## Site appraisal

- 3.3 This guide cannot cover every particular challenge, and each site is different. Therefore it is vital to appraise the site thoroughly to produce an appropriate design solution. Some sites may need specific solutions which do not comply with certain General Principles when responding to particular circumstances. **Where the site appraisal suggests a proposal that does not adhere to this guidance, a complete justification of the design approach will need to be provided in a design and access statement.**
- 3.4 Each application will be considered on its own merits. Existing extensions of poor quality should not be taken as precedents for new proposals.

## Contemporary design

- 3.5 Exeter City Council does not wish to restrict high-quality creative designs and welcomes appropriate innovation. It will support contemporary design, provided that it fits in well with the street scene and responds well to all other planning considerations.
- 3.6 Where a contemporary design is proposed, an application should be accompanied by a design statement justifying the approach taken and explaining how the design, notwithstanding its contemporary approach, adheres to the General Principles outlined within this chapter.

## Relation to site boundaries

- 3.7 No part of an extension, including rainwater goods, canopies and overhangs, should extend beyond site boundaries. If the extension overhangs, the works will no longer be a householder planning application, which is a simplified planning process. In this case applicants should seek prior agreement from the adjacent owner and a full planning application will be required.
- 3.8 Care should be taken when proposing an extension close to a neighbouring property to ensure that properties retain their independent form, and to provide adequate space for future maintenance of the extension including elements such as guttering and aerials.
- 3.9 There is potential for foundations to be built up to the boundary line but, depending upon the technical design of the foundation, the walls which they support might need to be constructed inset (as illustrated in Figure 3.1). Consider other possible technical constraints such as the strategy for rainwater disposal or surface water drainage, which may also need to be accommodated adjacent to the site boundary.

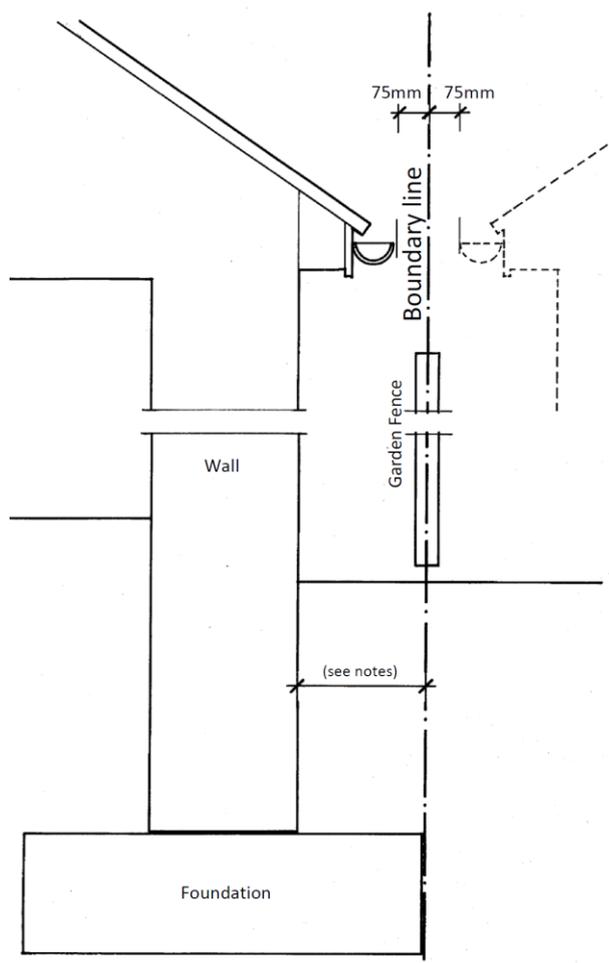


Figure 3.1: Example relationship of development to site boundary

## Access, parking and servicing

- 3.10 An over intensification of the existing residential use through an extension or alteration, may result in an unacceptable deficit in the servicing requirements for the property contrary to Local Plan First Review 1995-2011 policy DG1. This may be in terms of car parking, storage space for cycles, refuse and recycling or even useable external space. This can also impinge on the overall function of the area, affect highway safety and diminish the attractiveness of the neighbourhood.
- 3.11 Garage conversions to habitable accommodation can require planning permission, please check the [Planning Portal](#) or discuss with the City Development Team if you are unsure whether your proposal needs permission. This type of development can result in the loss of a potential on-plot parking space, if this is the case and planning permission is required, Devon County Council as the local Highway Authority, would need to be consulted as part of the planning process to assess any resulting impact upon the surrounding roads.

## Gardens

- 3.12 Gardens are an important characteristic of many parts of Exeter forming an intrinsic part of the identity of a particular locality or neighbourhood. They are important for the health and wellbeing of households. They add to the biodiversity, forming an extensive network of habitats and wildlife corridors throughout the city and their importance to the diversity and richness of urban landscapes is often overlooked. Gardens provide good sources of food for insects, and for birds. They may include nesting sites for birds, habitats for frogs, toads, slow-worms and hedgehogs, etc and also ponds, attract dragonflies and other aquatic and semi-aquatic insects. In the longer term gardens will be essential to help society adapt to the effects of climate change and allow for the growing of local food. They are therefore a resource to be protected for now and for the future.
- 3.13 Development affecting residential gardens should:
- Ensure that extension and alterations of homes will allow residents to feel at ease within their garden (Local Plan First Review 1995-2011 policy DG4 part b), and
  - Meet the standards for space and design as set in principle 9 of the General Principles, and within Chapter 7 of the [Residential Design Guide SPD - Exeter City Council](#).

## Materials and detailed design

- 3.14 In order to support local distinctiveness and to harmonise with the existing property in line with the General Principles (Section 3), the materials used in an extension should usually match and correspond with those of the host building. This includes the use of string or dental courses, brick patterns and quoins as well as sills, lintels and copings. There are a multitude of different colours, textures and shades of bricks and external finishes and it is critical to the success of an extension to ensure new external walls match the existing as closely as possible. This will be an important factor within the application and if precise details of the materials proposed are not agreed prior to determination, they may be subject to a condition requiring a separate submission and an additional fee to discharge.
- 3.15 Other architectural details of the host building may be equally important and an extension should not harm or detract from these. Instead they should be protected and as appropriate repeated within the extension. Examples include projecting bays, chimneys and special types of window such as oriel or bay windows.
- 3.16 Where it is not possible to replicate the materials of the original building then a clear contrast may be preferable to an approximate match and for a recessed 'shadow gap' or other type of

constructional seam to be introduced between 'old' and 'new'. Sometimes glazing can act usefully in this way.

- 3.17 The openings in a building are key aspects of the design and visual appearance. It is essential that new doors and windows adhere to the character of the property and general area. Generally the size, positioning, proportion, shape and materials of existing windows should be repeated in an extension and this also provides a strong clue as to the appropriate proportion for the extension itself. Recessing of windows i.e. the depth they are set back from the face of the elevation is a key characteristic of many of the older homes within the city. Replacement windows should very closely follow the character of the originals paying attention to their general pattern, means of opening and thickness of frames and glazing bars.
- 3.18 The external insulation of whole existing buildings in order to improve their energy performance is likely to promote lightweight cladding finishes and these may be difficult to reconcile with the established character of a neighbourhood where this is dominated by brick or masonry walls. A highly-contrasting render finish is unlikely to be acceptable and tile-hanging or some other form of ceramic or clay-based cladding may be more successful in an area dominated by brick. Consider the textures, rhythms, colours and tones that are present in the building, its setting and the wider context of the site in seeking suitable cladding materials and finishes.

## 4. Rear Extensions

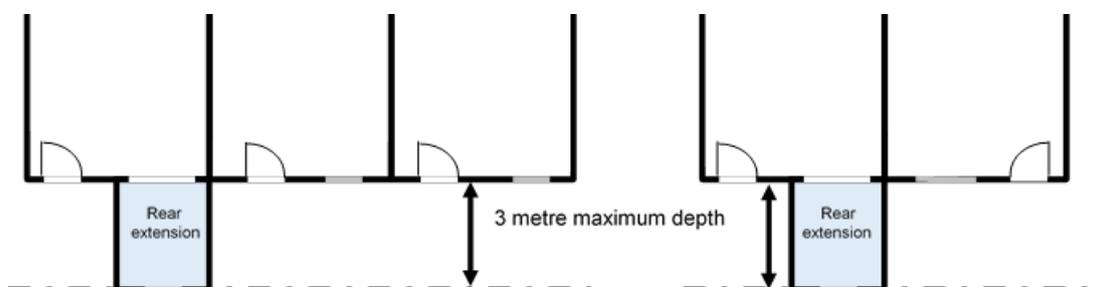
*This chapter should be read in conjunction with Section 3: General Principles*

- 4.1 Rear extensions may not always be in the public view, but it is still important to ensure the design quality is of a high standard so as not to detract from the character of the existing dwelling. A key consideration for both single and two-storey rear extensions is the impact upon the garden and rear external space, and the living conditions of a neighbouring property. This is particularly significant when the extension is near the property boundary.

### Depth

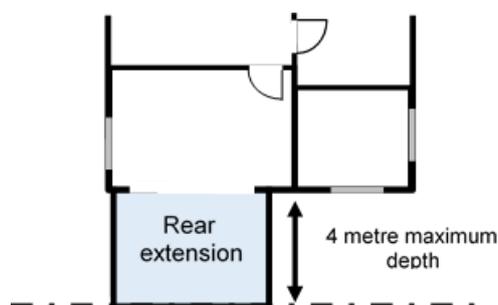
- 4.2 Extensions should be proportionate to the original building and avoid blocking natural light and outlook to neighbouring properties. The following depth limits ensure these requirements will be met (see also Figures 4.1 and 4.2):
- Terraced or semi-detached houses: maximum depth for a rear extension is **3 metres**.
  - Detached houses: maximum depth for a rear extension is **4 metres**.
- 4.3 Depth measurements should be taken from the main rear wall of the original house. If in doubt about measuring, contact the City Development team at Exeter City Council for advice.

#### Terraced and semi-detached houses



*Figure 4.1: Terraced or semi-detached houses: maximum depth for a rear extension is **3 metres**.*

#### Detached houses



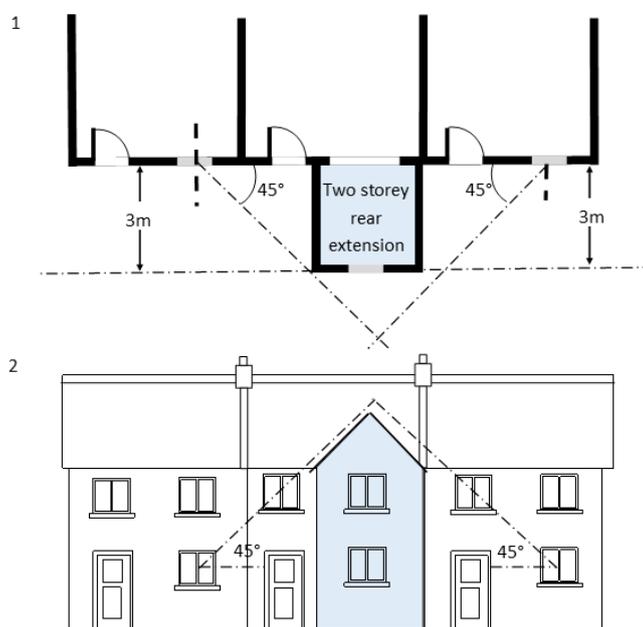
*Figure 4.2: Detached houses: maximum depth for a rear extension is **4 metres**.*

- 4.4 Two-storey and first floor rear extensions are more likely to impact neighbours than single-storey ones in terms of natural light, outlook and amenity or living conditions. Therefore, in addition to the depth limits, the commonly adopted "45 Degree Rule" is used to assess proposals of this kind, as indicated in the diagrams below.
- 4.5 In the case of two-storey extensions, neighbouring properties should be clearly shown on both plan and elevation drawings, showing the position and size of their nearest windows in relation to the proposed extension.
- 4.6 Sun path analysis may be helpful to demonstrate the impact of proposals if they do not comply with the 45 Degree Rule, or in more complex situations.

**The 45 Degree Rule – recommended by Building Research Establishment**

1. Draw lines at 45 degrees from the centre of the nearest ground floor habitable room\* windows of adjoining properties on an accurate, scale plan and ensure that the proposed plan fits within the area between the lines and the house (Figure 4.3).
2. Draw lines at 45 degrees from the centre of the nearest ground floor habitable room\* windows of adjoining properties on an accurate, scale elevation and ensure that the proposed elevation fits within the space made by the lines (Figure 4.3).

*\* Habitable rooms include all living rooms, bedrooms and kitchens, but exclude bathrooms, or circulation space.*



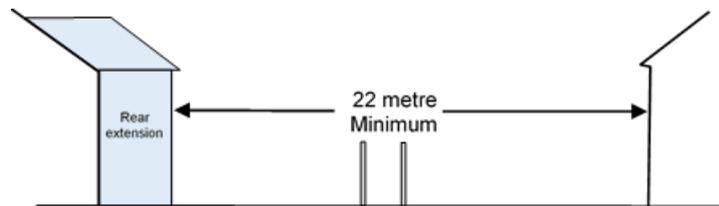
*Figure 4.3: The 45 Degree Rule illustrated on a two-storey extension for a terraced property.*

## Width

- 4.7 The width of an extension should ensure it remains subservient, in keeping with the house's character and has an acceptable relationship with neighbouring properties. Full-width extensions can be permitted if these aims can be achieved. The side walls of rear extensions should not normally extend beyond the existing side walls of the existing dwelling, as this can impact the character of the property and broader area.

## Privacy and outlook

- 4.8 Windows should not be placed on sidewalls overlooking neighbouring properties. High level, non-opening windows with obscure glass may be an acceptable solution in certain circumstances.
- 4.9 As outlined in the Local Plan First Review 1995-2011 (section 13.36), proposals for two-storey and first floor extensions should ensure that a minimum back-to-back distance of 22 metres is retained to preserve privacy (Figure 4.4). An extension may not be acceptable where the existing back-to-back distance is less than 22 metres and privacy is a concern.



*Figure 4.4: Back-to back distances: a minimum of 22 metres between the rear walls of the properties should be achieved in the interest of privacy and minimising overlooking.*

- 4.10 In cases of single-storey extensions, the 22m rule may be applied where overlooking occurs: for example, where there is a change in level.
- 4.11 The use of a flat roof as a roof terrace over a single-storey rear extension is likely to harm the privacy of neighbours and will not be acceptable. New balconies to the rear of properties are also unlikely to be acceptable. See Section 7 for more information on balconies and roof terraces.

- 4.12 Residents should be able to enjoy a good quality outlook without adjacent buildings being overbearing. Where habitable room windows face onto a blank or largely blank wall of another building, a minimum distance equal to twice the height of the blank wall (measured from ground floor level to eaves or parapet) must be provided between the two buildings (Figure 4.5).

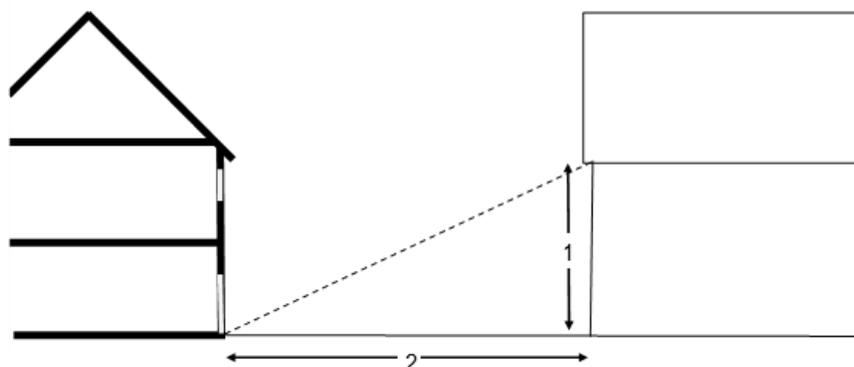


Figure 4.5: The distance between habitable room windows and a blank wall must be a minimum of twice the height of the wall.

- 4.13 Where there is a level difference between the two buildings, the distance must increase (Figure 4.6) or may decrease accordingly.

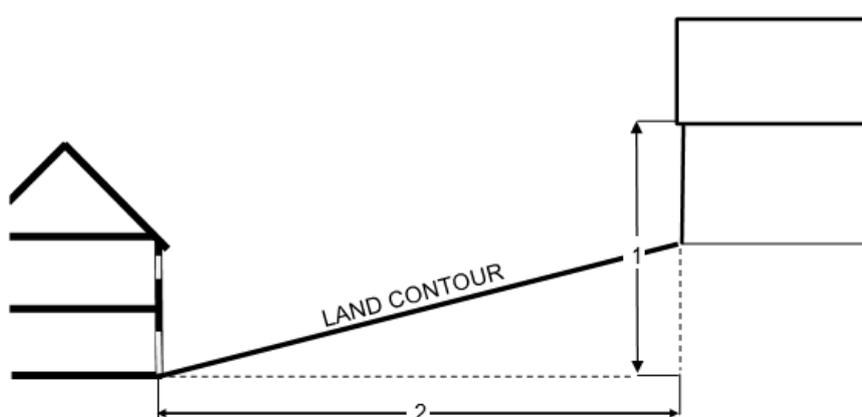


Figure 4.6: The distance between habitable room windows and an elevated blank wall must be a minimum of twice the height of the wall plus the level difference

## Single-storey rear extension roof height

- 4.14 For single-storey rear extensions, there should be a gap of at least 150mm (about two brick courses) between the highest part of the roof of the extension and the underside of the first floor windowsills (Figure 4.7). This is visually pleasing and helps preserve the character of the original house. If proposals do not comply, justification should be submitted with the application.



*Figure 4.7: Single-storey extension with 150mm gap between extension ridge and windowsills of the first-floor windows.*

## Conservatories

- 4.15 The criteria for single-storey extensions apply to conservatories. The design may need to include solid walls or fixed obscure glazing to prevent overlooking.

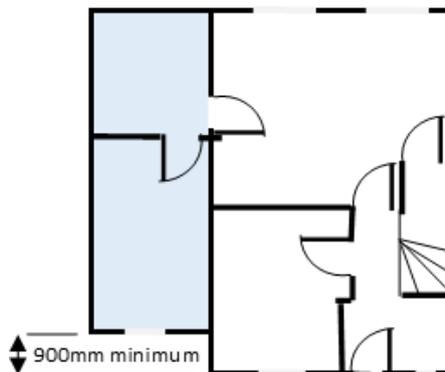
## 5. Side Extensions

*This chapter should be read in conjunction with Section 3: General Principles*

- 5.1 This chapter applies to single and multi-storey side extensions and first-floor side extensions over an existing structure such as a garage or carport.
- 5.2 In conjunction with the General Principles (Section 3), the guidance in this chapter will ensure that proposals preserve the character of the original house and the established street scene and protect the living conditions of the neighbours.

### Position

- 5.3 Extensions should be set back at least 900mm from the front main wall to ensure that the extension will be subservient to the original house (Figure 5.1). This arrangement allows the new additions to be read separately from the old, helping to preserve the established character of the street. Where there is an existing ground floor side extension in line with the principal elevation, the extension should again generally be set back not less than 900mm at the first-floor level. Where the street is characterized by a strong building line, with no setbacks it may be acceptable not to provide a 900mm set back. Side extensions that project forward of the dwelling's front elevation are unlikely to be acceptable.
- 5.4 *Please note: 900mm is in accordance with brickwork dimensions.*



*Figure 5.1: Side extensions should be set back at least 900mm from the front main wall of the house to ensure subservience.*

- 5.5 Single-storey side extensions beyond the rear main wall should comply with the guidance concerning depth for rear extensions outlined in Section 4. "Wrap around" extensions often do not look subservient and can harm the character of a dwelling and the amenity of neighbours but will be considered on an individual basis. Applicants are encouraged to use Exeter City Council's pre-application advice service to establish the best design solution.
- 5.6 Extensions of two-storey or higher, projecting beyond the rear main wall will not usually be permitted owing to the harm they may cause to the character of the main house, to the established townscape and neighbouring residential amenity.
- 5.7 Attention should also be given to a side extension's proximity to neighbouring boundaries and potential impact on neighbours. Any side extension close to the boundary risks being overbearing or causing overshadowing to the extent that it may not be acceptable.

## Proportion

- 5.8 To ensure an extension is subservient and is of visually pleasing proportions, it should be no more than half the width of the original house (Figure 5.2).

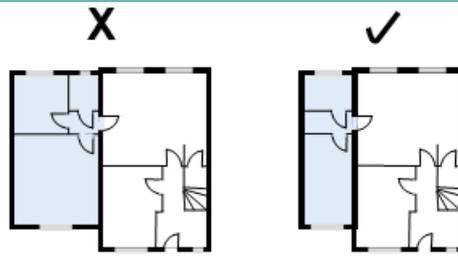


Figure 5.2: Side extensions should be no more than half the width of the original house to ensure subservience and visually pleasing proportions.

- 5.9 Side walls should remain parallel to the original house to ensure the established character of the street and the original house is maintained (Figure 5.3).

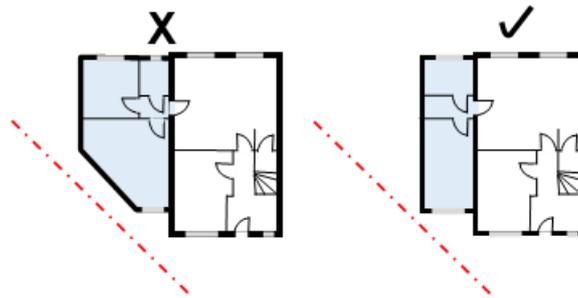


Figure 5.3: Side walls of extensions should remain parallel with the original house.

## Garages and carports

- 5.10 The criteria for side extensions apply to garages and carports. A 'lean-to' will often be the best solution unless the original house has a flat-roofed design. A lean-to roof may be hipped or vertical (Figure 5.4).

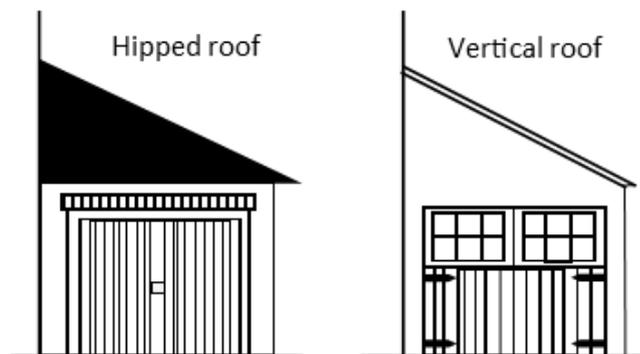
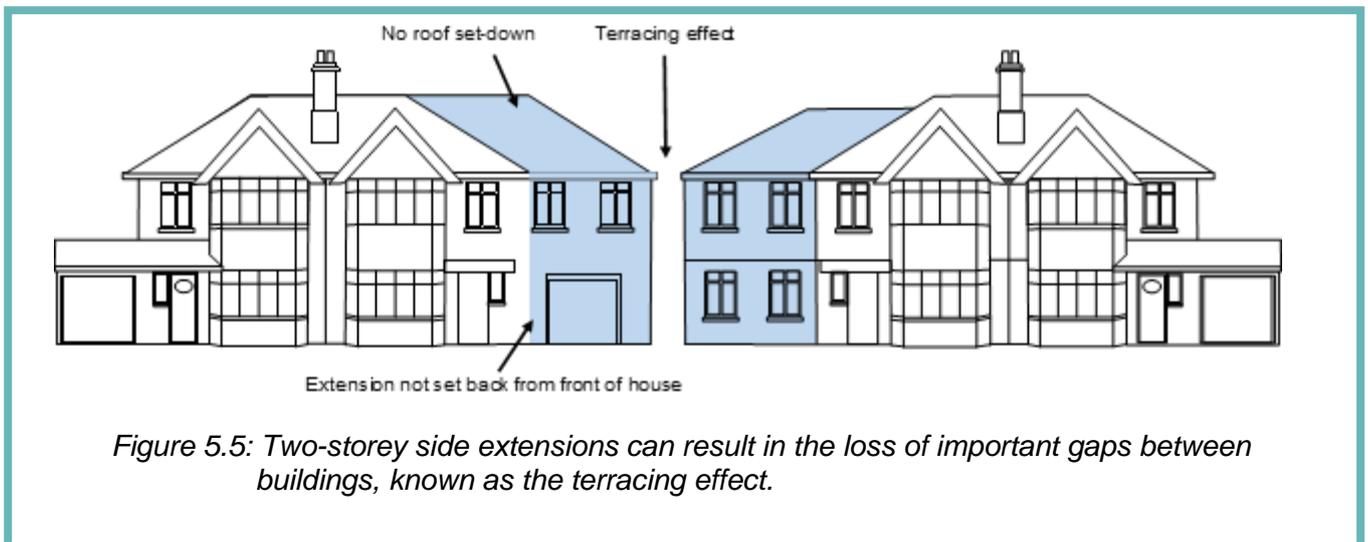


Figure 5.4. Lean-to roofs are considered the best option for a garage side extension, as shown these may be hipped or vertical

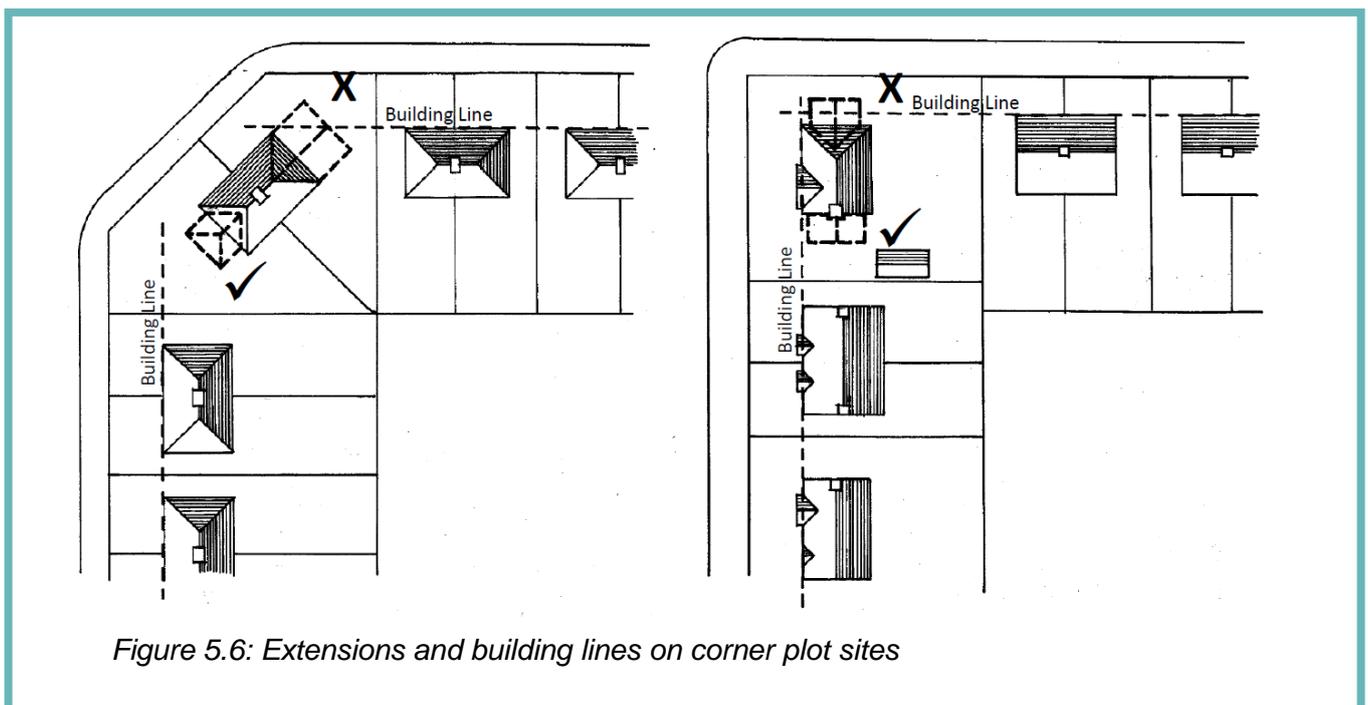
## Terracing

- 5.11 Careful consideration should be given to the potential for increased massing created by side extensions, particularly at the first-floor level. Infilling the spaces between properties can create an unwanted terracing effect in the street scene (Figure 5.5)



## Corner plots

- 5.12 A side extension on a corner plot may be visible within two streets and it is important that it is subservient to the host dwelling and is not dominant within either street scene. Extensions should be acceptable if they are set behind the building lines of properties on both streets (Figure 5.6) and adhere to the width and proportion criteria set out in Section 5. There may not always be a clear building line and in such cases the impacts on the street scene will be assessed on an individual basis.



## 6. Loft Conversions, Roof Lights and Solar Panels

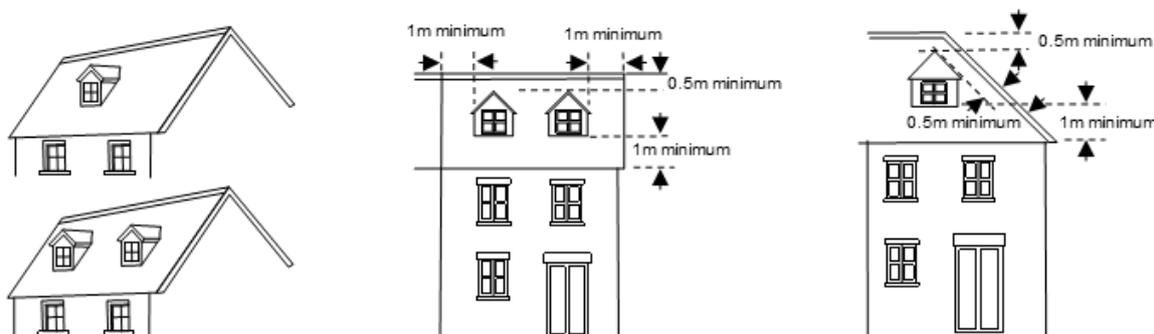
*This chapter should be read in conjunction with Section 3: General Principles*

### Principle and permitted development

- 6.1 Permitted development rights now provide greater scope for the addition of a dormer, that matches the existing roofing material, to the rear elevation of a property, often as part of a loft conversion. This permitted development right does not apply to homes located within a conservation area. To find out whether your home is within a conservation area please use our interactive map [Map of Conservation Areas - Exeter City Council](#). Please visit the Planning Portal for further advice on loft conversions: [Planning Permission - Loft conversion - Planning Portal](#).
- 6.2 When planning permission is required for a dormer, where there is an established townscape that is mainly without dormers, either at the front or rear of the property, proposals will not usually be acceptable. However, there may be greater scope where dormers have become an established part of the townscape.
- 6.3 If a dormer is required to provide headroom rather than just natural light for the proposed accommodation, the proposal is unlikely to be acceptable.

### Position

- 6.4 The following guidelines are provided in relation to the positioning of dormers:
- Dormers should either be located centrally or symmetrically on the roof, or be aligned with the windows below (Figure 6.1 left hand image)
  - Dormers should be set a minimum of 0.5m (measured vertically) below the ridge level, 1m above eaves and 1m from the boundary. For gabled roofs, dormers should be set in a minimum of 1m from the edge of the roof (Figure 6.1 central image).
  - For hipped roofs, extensions should not come within 0.5m of the hip tiles (Figure 6.1 right hand image).



*Figure 6.1: The three diagrams illustrate the advised positioning of dormers:*

- 1) left hand image: within the roof and relative to the windows below;*
- 2) central image: in relation to the ridge and edge of the roof;*
- 3) right hand image: position in relation to hip tiles for hipped roofs.*

## Size and scale

- 6.5 The size of dormers should be kept to a minimum so that the main roof of the house remains the dominant feature. The windows should be smaller than the habitable room windows on the main walls of the house so that the scale and proportions are visually pleasing (Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2: The dormer's size allows the main roof to remain the dominant feature, and the dormer window is smaller than the window on the floor below.

## Design details

- 6.6 A range of designs of dormer roofs may be acceptable (Figure 6.3). The appropriate design solution should be based on the original house's character and the street scene. Dormer cheeks should be clad in materials to match or complement the main roof.

Gabled roof



Hipped roof



Low arched roof

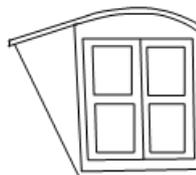


Figure 6.3: Potentially good dormer roof designs include gabled, hipped and low arched roofs.

## Privacy

- 6.7 Where a dormer window or roof light increases the potential for overlooking into the rear of neighbouring properties, planning permission will not usually be granted.

## Roof lights

- 6.8 The positioning of new roof lights within a roof slope should follow the design principles set out for dormers above. Where there are two or more roof lights to be introduced, they should be aligned, and a consistent size will normally create the most satisfactory appearance. Whenever possible, roof lights are best placed in the rear-facing slope so as not to be visible from the public street.
- 6.9 Roof lights that are the sole means of providing natural light to a space will only be acceptable if they are able to also provide a good outlook for occupants, whilst ensuring that overlooking is avoided.
- 6.10 In conservation areas, roof lights will not normally be approved if they result in harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area and therefore will not normally be approved on the front elevation. A rear elevation roof light in a conservation area is more likely to be supported where the visual impact is further reduced by specifying a type that can be fitted flush with the roof finish, sometimes referred to as a 'conservation roof light'. To find out whether your home is within a conservation area please use our interactive map: [Map of Conservation Areas - Exeter City Council](#).

## Solar panels

- 6.11 In many circumstances, solar panels fixed to the wall or roof of a house are classed as 'permitted development' and do not require planning permission. Use the following link for further advice: [Interactive House – Planning Portal](#)
- 6.12 If the solar panels are to be installed on a listed building or within the grounds of a listed building, Listed Building Consent and/or planning permission are likely to be required. In this instance, contact the City Development team to discuss your proposal.
- 6.13 For solar panels that need planning permission we would advise the following:
- Colour and material: Choose solar panels that match the colour and material of your roof. Many manufacturers offer solar panels with various frames and cell colour options to blend in with the existing roof;
  - Low-profile mounting: Opt for low-profile mounting systems that keep the solar panels closer to the roof surface. This minimises the visual impact.
  - Symmetry and alignment: Ensure that the solar panels are aligned symmetrically and evenly spaced. This creates a balanced look and helps maintain the architectural harmony of your roof.
  - Hidden wiring: Conceal wiring and connections as much as possible. This can be done by routing cables through the attic or behind walls to maintain a clean and uncluttered appearance.
- 6.14 If your property is in a conservation area, there may be other limits that apply, please check the [Solar panels - Planning Portal](#) for further advice. To find out whether your home is within a conservation area please use our interactive map: [Map of Conservation Areas - Exeter City Council](#).
- 6.15 It is advised that you ensure that your roof can support the weight of solar panels without compromising its structural integrity. Building Regulations will normally apply when installing solar panels on your roof. Please contact Exeter City Council's Building Regulations Team to discuss: [Building regulation approval - Exeter City Council](#).

## 7. Roof Extensions and Alterations

*This chapter should be read in conjunction with Section 3: General Principles.*

- 7.1 This chapter applies to roof extensions and alterations, including changes to roof shape, raising of the ridge and the installation of balconies and roof terraces.

### Altering the roof shape

- 7.2 Extensions involving roof alterations should ensure that they would not result in an imbalance between a semi-detached pair of dwellings or a small terrace. Proposals for altering the shape of roofs (e.g. from hipped roof to gabled roof) that result in imbalance will not be acceptable due to their detrimental impact on the street scene (Figure 7.1).
- 7.3 A well-designed alteration that returns symmetry to the pair may be acceptable.



*Figure 7.1: The hip to gable extension here results in a negative imbalance to the symmetry of the pair of semi-detached dwellings.*

### Raising of the roof ridge

- 7.4 The acceptability of raising the ridge of a dwelling will depend on the area's character and a sympathetic design to respect the scale and general appearance of the street, including its topography.
- 7.5 Raising the ridge of a single property within a terrace or as part of a semi-detached pair is unlikely to be acceptable.
- 7.6 Where additional thermal insulation is proposed to be added to an existing roof then all alternative strategies should be explored before resorting to raising its height. But if this is demonstrated to be necessary then this will be supported providing that very careful detailed design in accord with the General Principles (Section 3) is exercised and the original eaves line is maintained.

## **Additional storeys**

- 7.7 Additional storeys may be permitted on detached properties where they are sympathetically designed and respect the scale, continuity, roofline and general appearance of the street, including its topography.

## **Balconies and roof terraces**

- 7.8 Balconies or raised platforms will be assessed regarding design and impact on residential living conditions, including privacy. In many cases, they can significantly affect a neighbour's privacy and create a sense of overlooking, particularly if they are located where it is possible to look into gardens or windows that previously enjoyed privacy. The presence of balconies and roof terraces may also result in noise disturbance, particularly to nearby windows, and can also be harmful to the appearance of a building. Careful consideration must be given to the location and design of a balcony or a terrace, including any associated balustrades.
- 7.9 Balconies and roof terraces at the front and rear of the building, or any other prominent locations visible from the street, will only be acceptable where they do not harm the appearance of the building and the street scene.

## **Privacy**

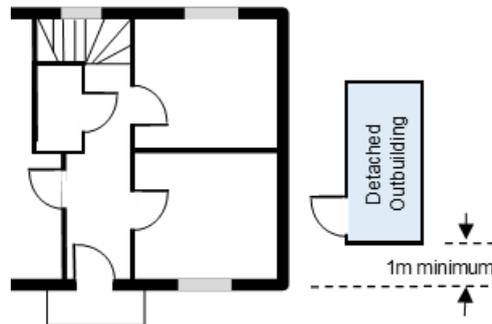
- 7.10 Roof extensions or alterations to include a balcony or roof terrace are unlikely to be acceptable where they are likely to overlook neighbouring properties and gardens.

## 8. Detached Garages, Outbuildings and Boundaries

*This chapter should be read in conjunction with Section 3: General Principles.*

### Location of garages and outbuildings

- 8.1 Detached garages and outbuildings should be set back at least 1m from the front main wall of the house to preserve the character of the street (Figure 8.1).



*Figure 8.1: The street's character will be preserved by setting back garages and outbuildings.*

### Subordinate and ancillary outbuildings

- 8.2 Outbuildings should be ancillary in use i.e. intended to be used by those living in the main house, and subordinate in scale to the dwelling.
- 8.3 Outbuildings that would function as new dwellings i.e. include all the facilities for self-contained living (including an opportunity for its own access), or are used as commercial space/premises, or a workshop for trade and employment, would not fall under the definition of a householder development. Such works will need planning permission in their own right and a different type of planning consent to the simplified householder planning consent. The different planning consents are outlined on the Planning Portal: [Consent types - Planning Portal](#).

### Design details

- 8.4 Detached garages and outbuildings should be confined to single-storey, so they are clearly subservient to the original house. A garage or outbuilding may not be acceptable where changes in level result in walls significantly higher than the standard domestic single-storey height. Garages should follow the General Principles (Section 3) by respecting the architectural character of the dwelling.
- 8.5 Double garages in conservation areas or associated to a listed building, should be accessed by two separate doors divided by a pier (Figure 8.2). Garage doors can significantly impact the established character of the original house and the street scene. Timber doors vertically rather than horizontally clad are normally the most appropriate design solution across various architectural styles.



*Figure 8.2: Double garages should be accessed by two separate doors divided by a pier if in a conservation area or within the setting/surroundings of a listed building.*

- 8.6 The width of driveways should be kept to a minimum to reduce the impact on the street scene. They should be surfaced in materials that complement the house and its garden. Enclosure to the street should be maintained by walls, railings, gates or planting (Figure 8.3). Particular consideration will be given to proposals for driveways in conservation areas where there is a need to protect the heritage value of the street scene and the established character of the front boundaries. To find out whether your home is within a conservation area please use our interactive map: [Map of Conservation Areas - Exeter City Council](#).



*Figure 8.3 The design of detached garages and drives should respect the local street scene.*

- 8.7 Any queries regarding dropped kerbs should be directed to Devon County Council as the local Highway Authority which is responsible for alterations to the adopted highway (see Section 9 for more information). If the kerb is on a classified road, planning permission will also be needed.

## Cycle storage

- 8.8 Structures to store cycles in front gardens will usually require planning permission. Exeter City Council will encourage and support cycle storage when appropriately designed. Cycle storage should not dominate the front garden, particularly where it will be prominent in the street scene or affect the setting of heritage assets. Acceptability will depend on the size and position of the storage in relation to the dwelling and the street scene and on the size of the front garden area. Where space is limited, and the storage would be prominent in the street scene, the structure should:
- Be the minimum size required to store one or two bicycles.
  - Be constructed of high-quality materials and colours appropriate to the setting.
  - Be positioned to respect the architectural appearance of the dwelling and avoid visual conflict with features such as windows or window ledges.
- 8.9 Further information on provision of cycle parking can be found in Chapter 6 of the [Residential Design Guide SPD - Exeter City Council](#).

## Boundary treatments (fences)

- 8.10 In terms of their design, Exeter City Council seeks to ensure that private boundary treatments that face public places should provide an appropriate level of security whilst making a positive contribution to the townscape. Close-boarded timber screen fences facing streets and public places will not be acceptable. Enclosure to front gardens should therefore be by walls, railings or hedges in order to create an attractive appearance and provide 'defensible space' (Local Plan First Review 1995-2011 policy DG4 part d) between the dwelling and the street.
- 8.11 Although not a common characteristic of boundaries in the city, planted hedgerows do form a distinctive feature in some neighbourhoods and they have great potential to support and enhance biodiversity. This type of boundary would not need planning permission, but may need to be accompanied by a temporary wire fence whilst the hedgerow became established (to contain pets, for instance).
- 8.12 A particular type of boundary treatment may be one of the defining characteristics of a conservation area. Maintaining and enhancing an existing pattern and means of enclosure may be an important consideration in a conservation area. To find out whether your home is within a conservation area please use our interactive map: [Map of Conservation Areas - Exeter City Council](#).

## 9. Other Relevant Information

### Conservation areas and listed buildings

- 9.1 Pre-application advice should be sought for proposals affecting conservation areas and listed buildings. Please visit [Planning pre-app advice - Exeter City Council](#). To find out whether your home is within a conservation area please use our interactive map: [Map of Conservation Areas - Exeter City Council](#).
- 9.2 All extensions, and many alterations, to listed buildings require 'Listed Building Consent' which is a separate process to obtaining planning permission. For further information visit: [Listed buildings - Exeter City Council](#).
- 9.3 For further information on undertaking work in conservation areas, please visit [Conservation areas - Other permissions you may require - Planning Portal](#).
- 9.4 For further information on alterations or extensions to listed buildings, please visit [Listed Buildings - Other permissions you may require - Planning Portal](#).

### Archaeology

- 9.5 On infrequent occasions, development can affect archaeological sites. Separate consent is required for this. Groundworks within central Exeter and in other historic areas can also affect buried remains. Please see the guidance on archaeology and development in Exeter: [Archaeology and Development SPG - Exeter City Council](#) or seek pre-application advice.

### Trees

- 9.6 Trees within conservation areas and trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders cannot be felled or pruned without the consent of Exeter City Council. To check whether any trees within or adjacent to your site are protected, and how to apply for works to a protected tree, please visit our website: [Tree Preservation Orders - Exeter City Council](#).
- 9.7 Important trees need to be protected during construction. Exeter City Council has produced [Trees and Development SPD - Exeter City Council](#) to assist householders and developers in retaining trees successfully.

### Ecology

- 9.8 Construction, demolition, extension or conversion proposals could affect a bat roost in a building. Exeter City Council will expect a bat survey to be submitted with a planning application in certain circumstances. Please see national advice for further information [Bats: advice for making planning decisions \(gov.uk\)](#).
- 9.9 Exeter City Council encourages householders to incorporate small scale opportunities for biodiversity enhancement in their proposals. These might include creating new habitats, enhancing existing habitats, providing green roofs and walls, planting trees or using sustainable drainage systems. Relatively small features can often achieve essential benefits for wildlife, such as incorporating 'swift bricks' and bat boxes in developments and providing safe routes for hedgehogs between different habitat areas.

## Highways: dropped kerbs, skips and scaffolding

- 9.10 A dropped kerb, often referred to as a vehicle crossing, is a section of pavement that allows vehicles to cross from the road over the pavement. Typically these do not require planning consent to be obtained from Exeter City Council. However, dropped kerbs nearly always require a licence to be applied for through Devon County Council before any work is carried out. Further information can be found by visiting: [www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/make-a-request/devon.gov.uk](http://www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/make-a-request/devon.gov.uk) and selecting 'Apply for a dropped kerb (vehicle crossing)'.
- 9.11 Skips, scaffolding and the storage of other materials or equipment on the highway, the term highway includes the pavement, nearly always need a licence which should be applied for through Devon County Council. Further information can be found by visiting: [www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/make-a-request/devon.gov.uk](http://www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/make-a-request/devon.gov.uk).

## Flood risk

- 9.12 Extensions within flood zone two and three will require a simple Flood Risk Assessment. Further information can be found via the following links:
- [Flood map for planning \(gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/282222/flood-map-for-planning.pdf)
  - [Flood risk assessment in flood zones 2 and 3 \(gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/282222/flood-risk-assessment-in-flood-zones-2-and-3.pdf)
  - [Preparing a flood risk assessment: standing advice \(gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/282222/preparing-a-flood-risk-assessment-standing-advice.pdf)

## Underground services

- 9.13 Applicants should consult the relevant bodies, such as South West Water, Wales and West Utilities and Western Power, to avoid building too close to or over underground services such as water, gas and electricity.

# Householder's Guide: Design of Extensions and Alterations

## Supplementary Planning Document



Your views are valued and responses to the questions will help shape the final version of the document

### Contact details

Local plans team, Exeter City Council,  
Civic Centre, Paris Street, Exeter, EX1 1JN

01392 265080

[planning.policy@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@exeter.gov.uk)

[exetersays.commonplace.is](http://exetersays.commonplace.is)



Please contact us to request this information in an alternative format or language.

We consider requests on an individual basis.