



Garden Extensions in the Countryside

Planning permission is required to extend the garden of a dwelling on to land which is used for another purpose. Within built up areas, proposals to extend gardens will usually involve land which has previously been developed and is derelict or vacant. In most cases, these proposals will conform with the Council's development plan policies and are therefore likely to be acceptable in principle, indeed they can have a positive effect on the appearance of a neighbourhood.

In rural areas, however, proposals to extend gardens have to be considered in the context of a wider range of planning issues. The Council is committed to maintaining the character and appearance of the countryside and safeguarding it from unsuitable development. By enlarging residential curtilages, changing plot boundaries and introducing domestic uses to land which was previously agricultural, garden extensions can have a significant visual impact. In many cases, such extensions gradually lead to urban characteristics (for example, sheds, garages, hardstandings, etc.) being introduced to areas whose open and attractive landscape qualities are highly valued.

The Council recognises the interest of some rural householders in having larger gardens. Where these can be provided in such a way that the landscape and appearance of the area would not be harmed, a garden extension may be acceptable.

Nevertheless, the Council's guiding principle is the need to protect the rural environment. This Guidance Note therefore sets out the issues which the Council will take into account when determining applications for garden extensions in the countryside.

14

Available in alternative formats

General Considerations

(a) Size and Scale

The amount of land which the Council will consider appropriate for inclusion in a garden extension will vary depending upon the size of the existing residential curtilage. Where a dwelling already has the benefit of a substantial garden area, an extension is unlikely to be permitted: however, where the area of an existing curtilage is severely restricted, an extension may be acceptable provided this is limited to the minimum amount of land appropriate for reasonable family enjoyment of the property. In considering whether the size of a proposed garden extension is appropriate, the Council will take particular account of :-

- *the aspect and location of the site;*
- *the presence of landscape features such as a break of slope, hedgerow, watercourse or woodland which could form a logical new boundary to the residential curtilage;*
- *the extent to which high quality agricultural land would be taken out of productive use.*

(b) Essential Services

Garden extensions to provide space for central heating fuel tanks, septic tanks or other services essential for domestic occupation are likely to be acceptable where there is insufficient space available for these services within the existing residential curtilage. However, the extension must be limited to the minimum area required to comply with installation requirements. In the case of above ground installations, structures and equipment will need to be coloured, screened or positioned in such a way that their effect upon the landscape would be kept to a minimum.

(c) Vehicular Access and Parking

If a dwelling has no vehicular access, an access with obstructed visibility or no off-road parking space, a garden extension which would enable a significant road safety risk to be removed may be permitted. In these circumstances, the extension will normally be limited to the minimum area required to comply with the Council's highway and parking standards.



Particular Circumstances

In certain locations, the need to protect the environment and safeguard visual amenity will be the principal considerations in determining proposals for garden extensions. These locations will include sites :-

(a) which are within a Green Barrier

Green barriers are defined in the development plan and are the primarily open areas separating the main towns and villages. They are intended to prevent the coalescence of settlements by limiting development to uses and activities which would not affect their open character. Substantial garden extensions within green barriers would erode this character and unless a proposal is of a very minor or insignificant nature, it is therefore unlikely that planning permission would be granted.

(b) where the extension would adversely affect the appearance of an outstanding, special or local landscape area

These are the most important landscapes in the County Borough. They have been designated in the development plan for their visual and environmental quality and the contribution which they make to the setting, amenity and character of settlements. Garden extensions could materially change the appearance of these areas and are therefore unlikely to be permitted.

(c) where the extension would adversely affect land of significant nature conservation interest

If the proposed extension would include a site, or part of a site, containing features of significant nature conservation interest, the need to protect these features is likely to take precedence over the case for extending a domestic garden.

(d) which adjoin a Settlement Limit

The development plan defines settlement limits beyond which the expansion of built up areas is not allowed. These limits, which generally follow the boundaries of existing properties or of land allocated for future development, establish a clear distinction between town, village and countryside. This distinction would be significantly weakened if domestic gardens were extended

indiscriminately outside these approved limits. The end result would be a gradual encroachment of development into the countryside. Accordingly, planning permission for garden extensions beyond settlement limits is only likely to be granted in exceptional cases where the new residential curtilage would be contained between the existing gardens of neighbouring properties.

(e) where the extension would result in the joining up of a substantial gap between dwellings

The development plan indicates that residential infilling between small gaps in a developed road frontage may be acceptable where no environmental damage would occur : garden extensions into such gaps may also therefore be permitted. However, proposals for garden extensions which would close up substantial gaps between dwellings are unlikely to be approved. It is essential that these gaps are maintained if the open character of the countryside is to be retained.

(f) if an extension has previously been permitted

If a garden extension has previously been permitted, it is extremely unlikely that a further extension could be justified in view of the additional landscape and amenity impact.

(g) where the extension is required to provide space for enlarging a dwelling

Enlargements to rural dwellings should be contained within the existing residential curtilage (see Local Planning Guidance Note No 13 : Housing in the Countryside). Development plan policies are intended to minimise the amount of built development in rural areas and planning permission to extend gardens in order to create space for enlarging dwellings is, therefore, unlikely to be granted.



Conditions

Conditions will normally be attached to planning permissions for garden extensions. The purpose of these conditions will be to mitigate the visual impact of extensions on the landscape and may include :

- removal of an occupier's permitted development rights to erect sheds, greenhouses and other garden structures,
- a requirement that the boundary of the extension (and, where relevant, other land in the control of the house-owner) should be enclosed either by a hedge formed of indigenous plant species or a natural stone wall,
- a landscaping requirement to ensure that the new garden area is assimilated into the surrounding countryside.

Further Information

This note should be read in conjunction with the relevant planning policies which apply to development in rural areas. These are contained in the development plan, copies of which are available for inspection in the Council's Planning Department. Planning officers will be pleased to discuss proposals informally before an application for planning permission is submitted.



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Adopted April 1998