

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item	13
Report No	PDI 34/15

**3 JUNE 2015**

**HOUSING EXTENSIONS AND OTHER RESIDENTIAL ALTERATIONS:  
SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE**

**Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure**

**Summary**

This report seeks Committee approval of Supplementary Planning Guidance for housing extensions and small-scale householder developments. The Guidance is aimed at both applicants and agents, and is intended to help speed up dealing with householder applications by setting out clear advice on layout and design.

**1. Background**

1.1 Members will be aware of the importance that the Scottish Government and the Council place on the need to deal with planning applications in a timely and efficient manner. The Council is also committed, through the policies in the Highland-wide Local Plan, in particular policy 28 (Sustainable Design) and Policy 29 (Design Quality and Place-Making), to ensuring that any new development is of a quality that contributes positively to both the urban and rural environment.

**2. Householder Applications**

2.1 In 2014 the Service dealt with a total of 3,742 planning applications, of which 887 were defined as householder applications. Almost a quarter of the applications dealt with by the Service were therefore small scale developments, including extensions, new decking, access ramps and new dormers. Whilst these are relatively small proposals, they can take up a significant amount of officer time if the original submission is of a poor quality and there is a need to seek revisions. The proposed Guidance is intended to avoid such situations by providing detailed information, and advice, on the standards that the Council will expect when dealing with such applications. This will enable them to be dealt with more quickly, and will improve the overall quality of submissions.

### **3. Content of the Guidance**

3.1 The Guidance covers a number of issues, notably:

- pre-application guidance;
- the importance of assessing the site before preparing a design;
- general design principles, including context, scale and sunlight/daylight;
- detailed design considerations, notably doors and windows, roofs, dormers and materials; and
- checklists.

The Guidance also provides illustrations of best practice.

### **4. Implications**

4.1 There are no direct resource, legal, risk, equality, climate change/Carbon Clever, rural, or Gaelic implications arising from this report.

#### **Recommendation**

Committee is asked to approve the supplementary guidance for publication and use by the Council.

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Date: 8 May 2015

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**SUPPLEMENTARY  
GUIDANCE:  
HOUSE EXTENSIONS &  
OTHER RESIDENTIAL  
ALTERATIONS**

**Draft :May 2015**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This guidance has been prepared to help you when submitting an application for planning permission to extend your house. It is also good practice for proposals that do not require planning permission because they are permitted development. The Council expects house extensions and alterations (including dormers, decking and replacement doors and windows) to:

- complement the existing house with the extension being subordinate in scale and character;
- be compatible with the character of the surrounding area; and
- respect the privacy and amenity of neighbours.

1.2 The Council welcomes and encourages discussions before a planning application is submitted. There are considerable benefits in seeking advice before making an application:

- it can identify at an early stage where there is a need for specialist input, for example about Listed Buildings or trees;
- it may lead to a reduction in time spent by your professional advisors in working up proposals, identifying potential problems and sorting them out before an application is submitted;
- it may indicate that a proposal is completely unacceptable, saving you the cost of pursuing a formal application; and
- it will help you identify all the necessary information required for a planning application.

The Council provides a Pre-Application Advice Service. Please click [here](#) for further information.

1.3 Many minor works and small extensions do not require planning permission. To determine if you require planning permission and/or a building warrant, the Council strongly recommends that you fill in a householder enquiry form. This is available from this [link](#). The information you supply on the enquiry form

will help us to determine if you need permission. Even where planning permission is not required, the following advice is good practice to avoid damaging your local environment.

1.4 You may not be aware of it, but your house, outbuildings and trees could be home to an animal species protected under European legislation. It is an offence to deliberately kill, injure, disturb or destroy such species and their places of shelter or protection. Therefore before seeking planning permission, or pursuing a development which does not require planning permission because it is permitted development, you should check to see if any animals are present. Bats in particular use a variety of places to roost and hibernate, occupying cavity walls and roof space in buildings. The presence of these species does not automatically preclude development but does mean that particular procedures must be followed. Further information is available [here](#) from Scottish Natural Heritage.

1.5 Any property within a conservation area and/or which is listed as being of 'Special Architectural or Historic Interest', is subject to more stringent planning control. This means that you will require planning permission for all external alterations including replacement doors and windows to buildings in a conservation area, and listed building consent for internal and external alterations to any listed building. Both planning permission and listed building consent will be required for external alterations to a house within a conservation area and which is listed. Information on the historic environment can be found at the links below.

### [Historic Environment Record](#)

### [Conservation Areas](#)

1.6 There are a number of Tree Preservation Orders within the Highland Council area where it is against the law to fell, lop or top trees without the permission of the Council. Trees are also legally protected against removal or damage in a conservation area. Elsewhere they may

be protected by a condition on a previous planning permission. You can check whether trees within or adjacent to your property are covered by a Tree Preservation Order by clicking [here](#).

## 2. BEFORE YOU START

2.1 Before looking at the detailed design of your extension, it is important to check if your site is suitable for the extension you want to build. The following questions will help.

- How much space is there around your house?
- What shape is the roof?
- From what materials is your house constructed?
- How much garden area do you have?
- How much space is there between properties?
- How far back from the road are other houses around your house?
- What shape and size are the windows and doors of your house?
- How do people define their boundaries (e.g. fences, walls, hedging)?
- What is the character of existing houses in your street?
- What impact will the extension have on trees and hedges?
- Will the extension reduce car parking space?
- How will you deal with surface water drainage?
- What impact will the extension have on neighbouring properties (e.g. overlooking or loss of light)?

2.2 Please note that extensions or alterations in the surrounding area that were granted permission in the past, and which do not comply with this Guidance, will NOT be taken as setting any form of precedent, and should not be used as examples to follow.

## 3. GENERAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

3.1 The Council encourages high quality, innovative, modern and sustainable design. Advice on sustainable design can be found in "[Sustainable](#)

[Design Guide – Supplementary Guidance](#)". The key design considerations that the Council will take into account when considering your application are set out below.

### Context

3.2 Your house forms part of its surroundings, whether in the open countryside, village or town. When thinking about extending or altering your house it is important to reflect the characteristics of the area, in particular the immediate neighbourhood. Think about:

- respecting the form and scale of surrounding development, including building lines, building pattern and spaces between buildings;
- the design of the original house. When complete, the whole building should still be in character with the scale of the surrounding properties and rhythm of the street; and
- the design approach – building form, scale, style, proportions including windows, storey heights and materials – should relate to the original building and be subservient to it.

### Scale

3.3 The scale and massing of an extension is crucial in ensuring that it fits with the existing house and surrounding neighbourhood. While the Council will take into account the existing development pattern, extensions should normally be subservient to the main house and should take account of the following:

- the extension should be smaller than the original house, preferably set back from the original building line;
- the house to plot ratio should not be excessive, and must keep usable amenity space and garden ground, bin storage and parking; and
- the maximum site coverage of all buildings, garages, parking and access driveways should not exceed 50% of the total site area.

### Amenity / Privacy

3.4 Most houses in residential areas are overlooked to some extent. The following measures can help to reduce the impact.

- Ensure that the location of windows does not adversely affect the privacy of neighbours.
- Generally, the minimum acceptable distance between windows of habitable rooms facing each other is 18 metres.
- Windows of habitable rooms above ground floor level should avoid overlooking neighbouring private garden space.
- Use of obscure glazing, where appropriate.
- Use of roof lights.
- Ensure there is no significant overshadowing of your neighbour's property.
- Screening using a hedge, wall or fence.

### Daylight and Sunlight

3.5 All extensions and alterations should ensure adequate daylight, privacy and sunlight both for themselves and their neighbours. Calculating daylight and sunlight is complex, but there are some simple "rules" which can be used to check whether a proposed development is likely to be acceptable.

3.6 Reasonable levels of daylight to existing buildings will be maintained where new development is kept below a 25° line from the mid point of an existing window. The centre of the lowest habitable room window is used as a reference point as shown below. If the whole of the development is beneath a line drawn at 25° from the horizontal, then it is unlikely that there will be a significant impact on daylight and sunlight. If part of the development is above the 25° line then there is likely to be an impact on sunlight and daylight and further information may be required.

3.7 The 45° test is used to check extensions that are at a right angle to a window as shown in the diagram below. A significant amount of light is likely to be blocked if the centre of the window lies

within the 45° lines on both plan and elevation. Where the extension has a sloping roof, the height of the extension should be taken half way along the slope of the roof.

## **4. DETAILED DESIGN**

### Size and Position

4.1 The impact on the existing property and neighbouring dwellings/buildings should be the principal consideration when determining the appropriate depth of an extension. However the following should be used as a general guide:

- rear extensions should not exceed a depth of 3 metres for a terraced house (including end of terrace) and 4 metres for a semi-detached house measured from the rear elevation of the original dwelling. Rear extensions on detached houses will be considered on their individual merits;
- rear extensions to detached or semi-detached properties should be sited to ensure adequate passage to rear gardens and bin stores. For this purpose, a minimum of 1 metre is considered to be a reasonable distance from a boundary;
- rear extensions may not be acceptable if:
  - they are too deep, that is where houses are "stepped" and sit behind their neighbours;
  - there are significant changes in level, that is where the property is at a higher level than its neighbour;
  - they are too bulky and prominent compared to the size of houses and gardens to which they relate; or
  - where compliance with the "25° and 45° rules" is not achieved.
- side extensions should not increase the overall width of a property by more than 50%;
- extensions that project beyond the front building line are not generally allowed unless this fits in with the local character of the street; and

- corner plots can present a particular problem where the majority of the house's garden space is in front of the building lines. Where they contribute to the character of the area, their openness will be protected by resisting any significant intrusion into the corner ground.

## Roof

4.2 Roof designs should respect the character and scale of the main property. The following should therefore be taken into account:

- roofs should not be higher than the original house;
- pitch, angles and materials should match or complement those of the original house;
- use a lower ridge height to help create a subservient extension;
- flat and mansard roofs on extensions will not normally be allowed unless these are complementary to the existing roof, or in the case of flat roofs they are on modest, single storey extensions or part of a high quality, contemporary design;
- side extension roofs should normally be pitched to match the house; and
- hip to gable extensions – an extension that results in the conversion of an existing hip roof into a gabled roof is not generally desirable and will be supported only where it is not out of character with the existing house and surrounding roofscape.

## Dormers

4.3 Dormers should be of such a size that they:

- do not dominate the form of the roof;
- do not cover more than 50% of the roof length, and a single dormer should not cover more than 30% of the roof length;
- are a minimum of 500mm clear of the ridge, hip and eaves of the original roof;
- are not built off the wallhead unless of a traditional design in a traditional building;
- are set at least 1 metre in from a gable end; and

- should generally not be located on the side of hipped roofs to avoid privacy issues.

Flat roof dormers will not normally be acceptable on traditional buildings. Elsewhere they will only be supported where they are in character with the overall design of the house and surrounding properties

## Materials

4.4 The materials to be used on an extension should normally match or complement those of the existing house and surrounding properties. In certain circumstances, an extension designed to contrast with the existing house may be acceptable. In this instance the materials should be of the highest quality and relate well to the existing building.

## Doors and Windows

4.5 The proportion and size of windows and doors should complement the design and proportions of the original building and should:

- respect the local character by siting large glazing such as French or patio doors on the private side of the house;
- give vertical emphasis to large windows by using mullions evenly spaced to traditional window widths; and
- avoid windows serving habitable rooms overlooking neighbouring private amenity space.

## Porches

4.6 Porches require a roof form, design and materials that relate to the existing house. Proposals should:

- use details to match those of the house such as eaves, verges, door and window details;
- not compromise the design uniformity of terraces;
- be of a size that does not dominate the existing house and does not obscure characteristic details of the house;
- have a limited forward projection - maximum 2m; and
- 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.

### Trees

4.7 Extending or altering a house can sometimes impact on trees within, and adjacent to, your or your neighbour's garden. Extensions in proximity to trees may have implications for damage to roots resulting in safety issues and possible tree loss. Roots can also be damaged during construction and there are potential shading effects from larger trees. The Council normally seeks to retain healthy trees important to the amenity and character of an area. You may be asked to carry out a tree assessment where an extension has the potential to affect trees. Further advice can be found [here](#).

### Access and Parking

4.8 Forming an access for a parking space or garage will require planning permission where it is taken from a classified road or trunk road. In all cases, a permit will be required from the Council's Area Community Services team (Roads) for works that include forming a new access to a public road. Further advice can be found

[http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20005/roads\\_and\\_pavements/101/permits\\_for\\_working\\_on\\_public\\_roads/2](http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20005/roads_and_pavements/101/permits_for_working_on_public_roads/2)

Proposals should:

- maintain adequate visibility;
- allow cars, where possible, to enter and leave in forward gear;
- ensure that any new access is not formed within 15 metres of a junction;
- maintain a minimum of two off street parking spaces, not including a garage;
- be constructed of high quality materials that are appropriate for the house and the area;
- ensure that paving is porous or combined with a soakaway within the site; the first 6 metres from the road edge should be paved to avoid loose chippings spilling out; and

- ensure that gates are of an appropriate design and open inwards, to avoid obstructing the pavement or road. In rural areas, gates should be set back at least 8 metres from the adjacent public road.

4.9 Guidance on forming a new access or upgrading an access is given in '[Access to Single Houses and Small Housing Developments](#)'.

### Drainage and Existing Watercourses

4.10 You must be able to provide connections to existing foul and surface water sewers or, in the case of surface water run-off from roofs and hard surfaces, provide alternative drainage on site such as soakaways. Private foul drainage systems may require upgrading depending upon the type and size of the extension. This will usually be assessed through the building warrant but may be affected by the land available at your site and should be considered when designing your scheme. Extensions should be set back a minimum of 6m from any existing watercourses. This may be increased further in accordance with the requirements for riparian buffer strips set out in the Council's supplementary guidance on '[Flood Risk and Drainage Impact](#)'.

4.11 Where the property to be extended is located within a flood risk area identified by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, we will expect the issue of flood risk to be adequately addressed through the design of the proposed extension. Further information can be found at the following [link](#).

### Outbuildings and Annexes

4.12 Buildings within the residential curtilage (including garden ground), such as garages, sheds or greenhouses, should be subordinate in scale and floor area to the main house. In many cases, they will be "permitted development". See para. 1.3 above with regard to enquiring whether you need planning permission. Proposals



that require planning permission will be assessed for their impact on the amenity of the area and on neighbouring property (e.g. loss of daylight) in the same way as extensions.

4.13 For outbuildings the use must be ancillary to the “enjoyment of the dwelling house”, for instance, gardening or hobbies. A “home office” use may also be acceptable where it does not change the overall character of the house as a residence and where the office use does not attract significant numbers of visitors.

4.14 Buildings in front gardens will not usually be acceptable because of the damaging impact on the appearance and amenity of the street and the surrounding area.

#### Self Contained Living Accommodation

4.15 Self-contained living accommodation separate from the main house may be acceptable but must:

- be subservient to the main house with a functional link (e.g. the occupants should be a dependant relative(s));
- be in the same ownership as the main house with a shared vehicular access;
- have no boundary demarcation or sub division of garden areas between the annexe and main house; and
- have adequate parking and amenity facilities for the needs of the annexe occupants and existing residents.

#### Balconies and Decking

4.16 Balconies and decking which are close to boundaries and overlook neighbouring properties can be a major source of noise and privacy intrusion. Open air balconies attached to first and higher floors or on existing flat roofs are likely to overlook the gardens of neighbouring residential properties. Such balconies are only acceptable if they do not introduce significant overlooking of neighbouring rear gardens. In some instances privacy issues from balconies or decking can be overcome by screening, for instance with frosted glazing, or by inseting the balcony or deck into the building or roof.

4.17 Where planning permission is required, decking should be at, or close to, ground level (taking account of any level changes in the garden ground), of simple design (including barriers and steps), and should not detract from the appearance of the house. Decking will not normally be permitted where there is an impact on the amenity/privacy of neighbours.

#### Boundaries

4.18 The type, height, length, designs, and siting of a boundary treatment are all important considerations as to whether it would be acceptable. Good quality characteristic materials help to reinforce local character, particularly in areas of historic interest. Boundary treatments such as planting or low walls with planting, are considered more appropriate as they soften residential frontages and contribute to the street scene. Hard boundary treatments, such as a solid screen above 1m in height, may cause harm to residential character by removing views of houses from the street and placing an obtrusive and harsh feature at the back of the pavement.

4.19 Boundary treatments should not be so tall that they dominate and have an overbearing impact on pedestrians and the street scene. In this regard the Scottish Government introduced the High Hedges (Scotland) Act in 2013, which is designed to help resolve disputes between neighbours. Further advice can be found [here](#).

#### Property Boundaries

4.20 Planning applications often involve work which is on or outside of the property boundary. This is not necessarily a problem but one of the most common causes of delay and objections to planning applications is a disputed property boundary. The Council does not keep records of private land ownerships and cannot arbitrate in this matter. If a dispute arises it can cause cost and delay. You are advised to keep all works within your own boundary and not to encroach either above

or below your neighbour's property. It is recommended that proposals keep away from jointly-owned hedges, fences and walls both to reduce the possibility of any neighbour disputes and to help facilitate future maintenance.

### Crime

4.21 The design of an extension can contribute to the safety and security of both your own home, and that of your neighbourhood, by ensuring your property and surrounding area can be observed from within your home. The Police Scotland Force Architectural Liaison Officer Service can provide advice to members of the public and architects and designers on a range of crime reduction initiatives including Secured by Design. More detailed advice can be found [here](#).

## 5. PERMISSIONS

5.1 Before you can build your extension, there are several other permissions that you may need. Click the links for further information.

- If you require [planning permission](#) to alter or extend your house or to carry out other works you will have to submit a planning application and plans showing your proposal.
- If your property is listed then you may also require listed building consent
- You may also require a [building warrant](#) for your extension.
- A [Road Permit](#) will be required if forming a new access or driveway.

## 6. CONTACT INFORMATION

Telephone : 01349 886608

[Enquiry Form](#)

## CHECKLIST

- Is the site big enough to take an extension?
- Does the layout and scale fit with the general pattern of development within the area?
- Is the design of a high enough standard for the house and area?
- Is the extension subservient to the main house?
- Does it avoid any overlooking which would result in a loss of privacy for neighbours?
- Does it avoid overshadowing the neighbouring properties and significantly reducing their daylight?
- If a side extension, does it avoid a terracing effect?
- Does it leave enough garden space for a house of the final size?
- Does it avoid loss of significant trees or landscaping?
- What is its impact on access, parking and road safety?
- Are the details and proportions of doors and windows appropriate?
- Does it leave enough space for adequate car parking and turning?
- Is it at least 6 metres clear of existing watercourses?