

Supplementary Planning Document

Residential Design

Guide – section 2

Appearance and character of
house extensions and alterations



April 2014

1: Introduction

This design guide has the status of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and was adopted on 1 April 2014. It has been prepared to support policies of the North Somerset Replacement Local Plan and Core Strategy and also has regard to national planning guidance. It does not contain new policies or proposals and was prepared in consultation with agents, local councils and the general public.

The purpose of the SPD is to provide consistency and detailed guidance for those involved in designing proposals for house extensions. It will be used as a basis for giving pre application advice to applicants and will form a material consideration in the determination of any subsequent planning applications. It is not intended to impose rigid controls over detailed design matters or stifle originality or innovation.

Development proposals that follow the principles contained within this document are unlikely to be refused planning permission due to concerns about the visual impact.

This is one of a series of documents that provide important guidance about various aspects of residential development. Subjects covered by other documents that are relevant to extending or altering dwellings include: protecting the living conditions of neighbours (privacy etc); parking standards; drainage and providing adequate waste and recycling facilities. You should read and consider these documents carefully before you design your scheme. They can be viewed at www.n-somerset.gov.uk.

This document relates to planning legislation only. We have also produced advice to help people undertake a building project, which covers important subjects such as Building Regulations, the Party Wall Act, selecting a builder, insurance, and how to submit a valid planning application. We strongly recommend that you read this advice which is available on our website.

1.1 Why good design is important

Poor quality extensions and alterations can have a harmful effect on an area and may reduce the value of your property. In contrast, extending or altering your property to a high standard may increase the sale price and enhance the character of the local area. It is important therefore that changes are in keeping with or enhance both the original house and the character of the local area.

2: What you should do

2.1 Do your research

North Somerset has many neighbourhoods which have a distinct character and identity. This is often reflected in the shape, layout and architectural style of the buildings, the materials they are made of and the landscape in which they sit.

Before you start to design your extension or plan alterations, take a careful look at your property and the buildings and landscape around it. Identify those things that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. In particular consider the following:

1. Built form, scale and proportions
2. Roof form and pitch
3. Window and door shape, style and details
4. External materials
5. Gardens, trees and landscaping
6. Boundary wall, gates and piers
7. Previous house extensions and alterations in the area

You could also approach your neighbours who have had extensions to ask them about their experience. Questions you could ask might include the following:

1. Is it the right size, now that the extension is in use?
2. Is it adequately heated in winter and ventilated in summer?
3. Is there anything they wish they'd done differently?
4. What makes it work well?

2.2 Get help and advice

The next step is to design your scheme so that it preserves or enhances the features that you have identified so that the finished building sits comfortably within the street scene. To help you do this we recommend that you seek expert help and advice. There are two main ways that you can get help and advice and these are explained below.

2.2.1 Employ a professional

We recommend that you employ the services of an architect or professional planning agent. An architect or similar professional with experience of working on properties in your area should have a sound understanding of what is acceptable. This can make getting the necessary approval for your project a smoother and quicker process.

You can find architects, surveyors, planning consultants and other professionals that can help you by looking in local newspapers or by doing a quick search on the internet. You can find a local architect with relevant experience via the **Royal Institute of British Architects** website. We have also provided helpful advice about architects and agents on our website.

2.2.2 Find out if you need planning permission

Many dwellings can be extended or altered without the need to get planning permission. To find out if your proposal needs planning permission you can visit the Planning Portal website at www.planningportal.gov.uk. For a small fee we also offer an informal written

advice service about the need for planning permission. You can learn more about this service on our website.

2.2.3 Review council policies and advice

Policy GDP/3 of the adopted North Somerset Replacement Local Plan and policy CS/12 of the Core Strategy both promote good design. You can read these policies on our website. The purpose of this document is to give specific advice about how to comply with these policies. For this purpose section three below sets out the key principles that you should abide by when designing your project. Proposals that abide by these principles are unlikely to be refused planning permission for reasons relating to the visual impact.

In addition, you should carefully read other relevant advice documents which are available on our website. To help you we have prepared a webpage for home owners who want to make alterations to their property. This webpage contains advice about a range of important issues you should consider such as: parking standards; providing adequate waste, drainage and recycling facilities; Party Wall Act and Building Regulations. Information about how to preserve the living conditions of neighbours can be found in our Supplementary Planning Document "Residential Design Guide – Protecting the living conditions of neighbours" which is also available on our website.

3: Key design principles

It is impossible to make an advice note that explains how to design an extension for every type of house, property or location. However, the following seven principles, when followed correctly, will help you to design a scheme that relates well to the character of the original house and the street scene.

The seven principles are:

1. Scale
2. Shape
3. Layout
4. Openings
5. Materials and finishes
6. Landscaping
7. Other improvements

The remainder of this document contains specific advice about each of these seven key principles.

3.1 Principle One – Scale

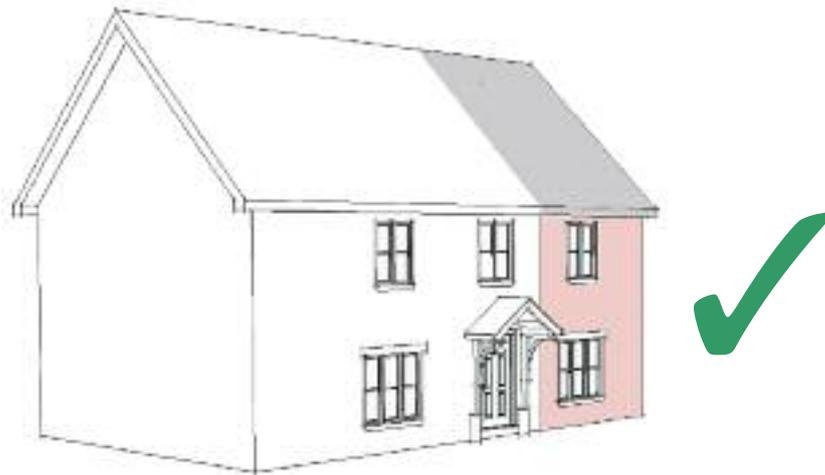
Ask yourself: *Would the size and bulk of the proposed extension or out building be disproportionate to the original building?*

The standard: *Overly large extensions or buildings that harm the visual quality of an area will not be granted planning permission.*

3.1.2 Side extensions

Extensions should not be so large that they would harm the balance and proportions of the original building and the character of the area.

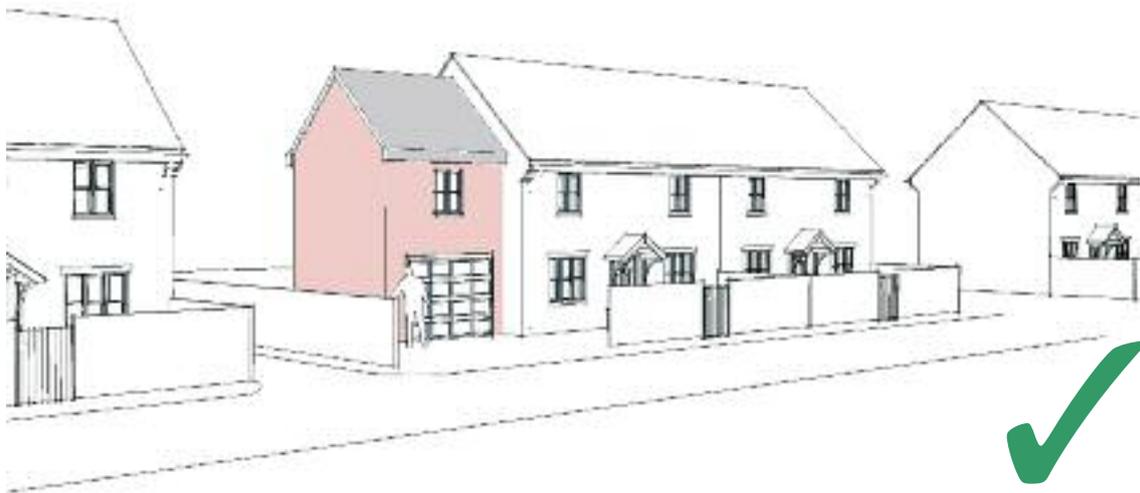
One way to ensure that an extension does not harm the balance and proportions of the original building is to design it so that it appears as if it was originally designed to be part of the building, as one coherent whole.



When adding an extension to the side of an end of terrace house it is sometimes more suitable to continue the terrace building line and roof ridge height. In this way the extension would appear as if it was originally designed to be part of the terrace, as one coherent building.



Another way to ensure that an extension does not harm the balance and proportions of the original building is to make the extension subservient to the original house. Subservient extensions can help to maintain the architectural integrity of the original building and the character of the street. To make an extension subservient you could set it back from the front wall of the house by at least 400mm at first floor level and step it down from the roof ridge height by the same distance. The following image shows an extension that is subservient to the original building and therefore does not harm the balance and proportions of the building or the appearance of the area.



3.1.3 New buildings

New buildings such as garages should not be overly large so that they dominate either the original house or street scene.



3.2 Principle two – Shape

Ask yourself: *Would the shape of the proposed extension or new building be in keeping with the shape of the original building?*

The standard: *Inappropriately shaped extensions or new buildings that harm the visual quality of an area will not be granted planning permission.*

3.2.1 Shape of extensions

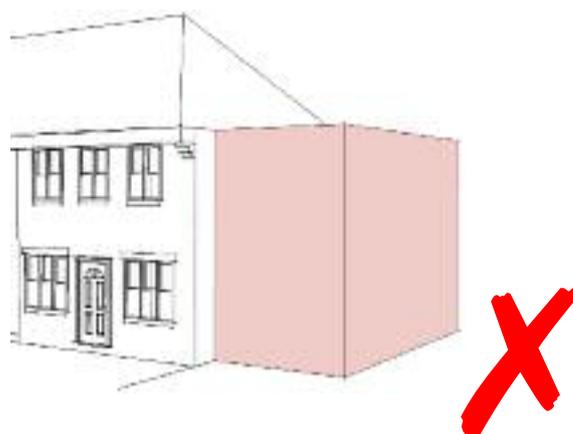
Extensions that are visible from public view points that have corners cut off or which have awkwardly aligned walls can appear out of keeping with the original building. The degree to which such features harm the visual quality of the area depends on its scale and prominence and the degree to which it is at odds with the design of the existing house.



3.2.2 Shape of roofs

The roof is a key feature that helps define the shape and massing of a building. Any proposed extension should have a roof that reflects the style of the existing building.

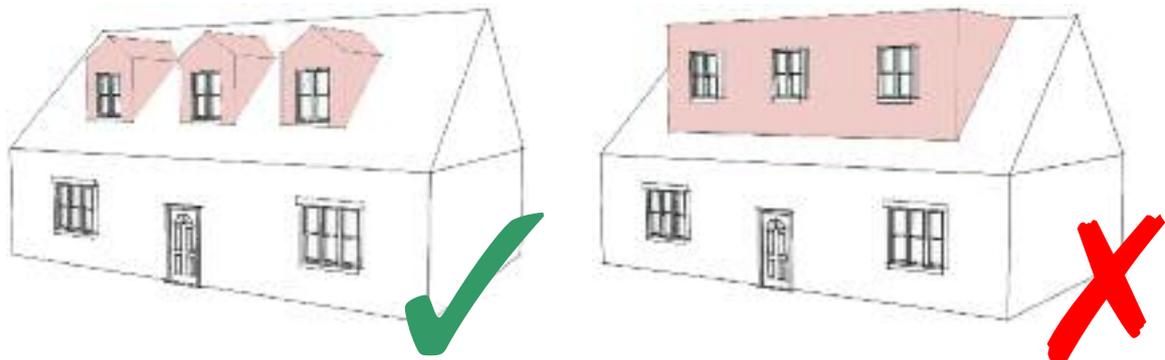
For most buildings of a traditional form with a pitched roof this often means that flat roofs will be unacceptable in prominent locations. Instead, a pitched roof is likely to be more appropriate. Flat roofs can be used however for single storey extensions to the rear that would not be seen from public areas or as part of a contemporary high quality design solution that complements the existing building and street scene.



3.2.3 Shape of dormer extensions

There are many examples of inappropriate dormer roof extensions that, due to being too large in relation to the original roof-slope, harm the appearance of the house. To achieve a good design it is necessary to pay particular attention to the size and form of the existing roof. Dormer extensions should be designed so that their size and design is proportionate with the roof of the existing building.

Large, box-like dormers and large dormer windows are inappropriate for the majority of domestic properties where they would be visible from public views. Normally, the original roof form should remain the dominant feature in the appearance of the building.



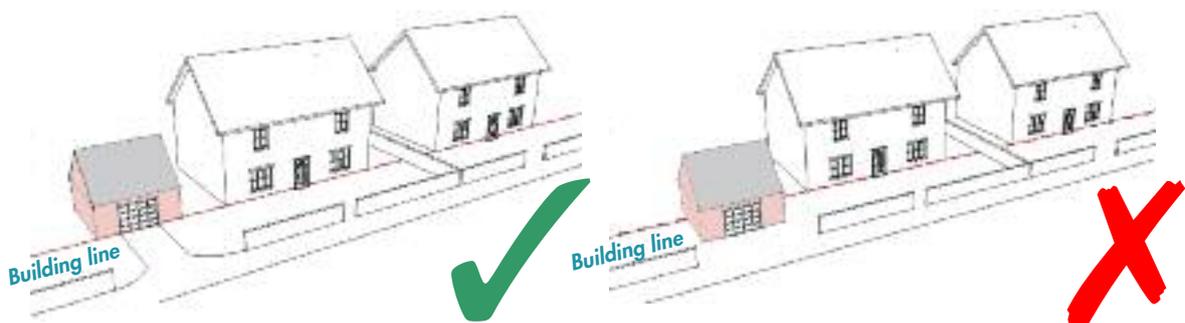
3.3 Principle three – Layout

Ask yourself: *Would the location of the proposed extension or new building relate well to the existing building and the street scene? Would it project forward of the building line or be at an overly prominent location or on a street corner?*

The standard: *Poorly located or sited extensions or new buildings that harm the visual quality of an area will not be granted planning permission.*

3.3.1 Building lines

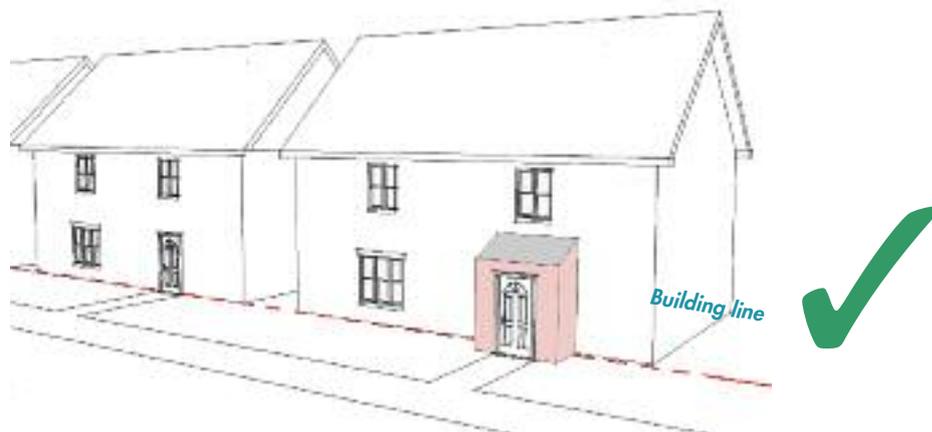
Building lines and frontages are readily apparent in most areas and are formed when there is a line of buildings in row. Established buildings lines should be respected. Large extensions or outbuildings which break such lines will not normally be allowed where the proposal would harm the appearance of the street scene or open nature of the area.



3.3.2 Front extensions

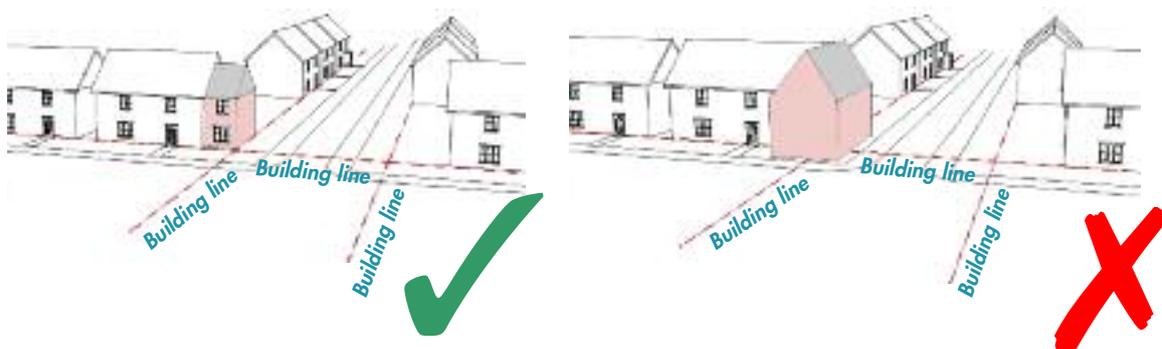
The front elevations of houses are normally the most difficult to alter or extend satisfactorily. Small additions that project forward of the building line, such as porches, may be permissible but should generally reflect the style of the house and neighbouring properties, respect the existing roof pitch, windows, doors and building materials.

Large front extensions that harm the character of the building or area are unlikely to be acceptable.



3.3.2 Street corners

Particular attention needs to be paid to the design of both single and two storey extensions on corner plots. This is because they can encroach over the building line on either highway frontage, and therefore be particularly prominent in the street scene.



3.3.3 Gaps

The gaps between houses can be an important characteristic with functional use for maintenance and rear access. Their infilling with side extensions can detract from the appearance of the neighbourhood if it would result in a cramped, 'terracing effect'. Therefore proposals for two storey side extensions (single storey side extensions on bungalows) near the boundary with adjoining properties should be set back and leave a gap of at least 1 metre between the extension and the site boundary as shown below.

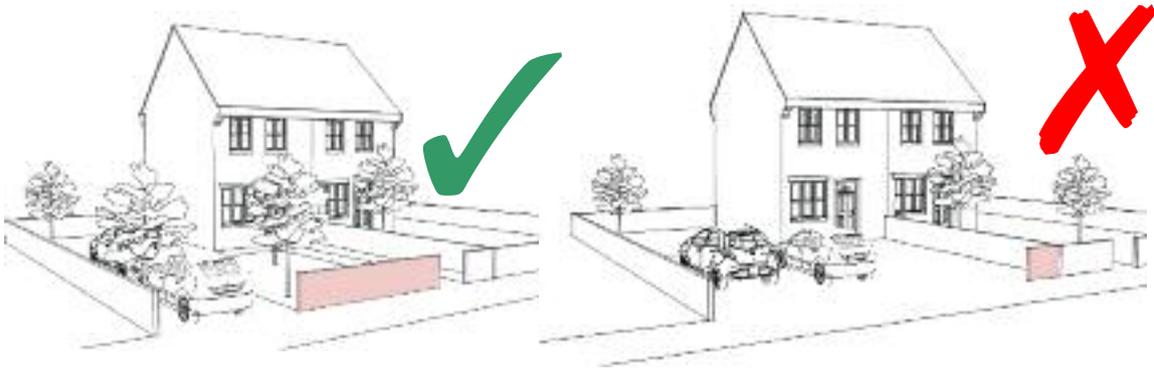
Note: The 1 metre gap referred to above can also help to ensure that suitable access to the rear of the property is maintained. Further information about the need to provide suitable access for waste and recycling can be found in our advice note "Recycling and waste storage in residential development" which can be found on our website.



3.3.4 Parking areas

Where new entrances are proposed along a boundary these should retain as much original walling, fencing or railings as practical to ensure the appearance of enclosure is preserved. The construction of large open hard surfaced areas can have a harmful effect on the setting to a house.

Where a hardstanding for car parking is proposed, sufficient space for soft landscaping should be incorporated where possible to screen cars and minimise the visual impact of the hard surfaced area. Planting can enhance residential areas and can have excellent screening value. In addition areas of planting can be used to receive surface water run off. Permeable or porous materials should be used to reduce surface water runoff and possible risk of flooding.



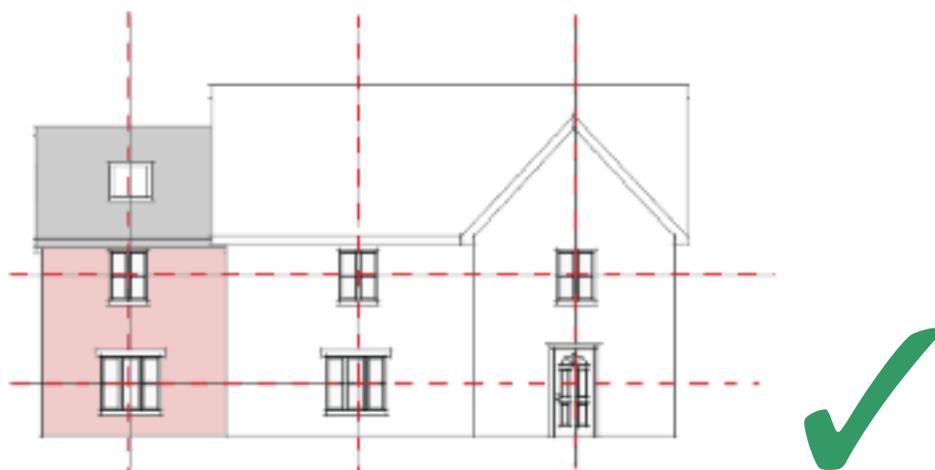
Please refer to the **North Somerset Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document** which, at Section four and five, provides full details of parking standards for residential development.

3.4 Principle four – Openings

Ask yourself: *Would the size, location, proportions and materials of any new doors and windows complement those of the original building?*

The standard: *New or altered openings that do not relate well to the existing openings of the building will not be granted planning permission.*

When introducing new windows (including rooflights) or doors, careful attention must be given to the sizes, proportions and styles, as well as the internal division of the proposed openings and the materials used. In general all windows or doors should be the same as, or complementary to the existing windows or doors. The positioning of windows or doors within an elevation should normally 'line up' with existing openings as shown below.



3.4.1 Roof lights

Rooflights are an acceptable way of allowing light into a loft space as they maintain the roof plane and have less visual impact than dormer windows. Rooflights should not be of a size or number that will dominate the appearance of the roof slope. ‘Low profile’ rooflights, with little or no projections above the roof finish are preferred as they have a reduced visual impact.



Roof lights should be small in scale and symmetrical with other window and door openings

3.4.2 Windows in historic buildings

We have prepared an advice note to help people who own an historic building or who live in a Conservation Area and want to alter the windows. This advice can be found on our website.

Note: When inserting new windows don't forget to consider if they will reduce privacy for neighbours. We have produced specific guidance about preserving privacy in our documents called "Residential Design Guide – section 1 protecting the living condition of neighbours" which is available on our website.

3.5 Principle five – Materials and finishes

Ask yourself: *Would the materials match or complement the materials of the original building? Are there any details on the original building or in the local area that could be successfully incorporated into your scheme? Consider the rain water goods (gutters and down pipes), soffits and barge boards.*

The standard: *Inappropriate materials and finishing details that do not relate well to the existing building will not be granted planning permission.*

3.5.1 Materials

To ensure that an extension enhances the appearance of a dwelling and the character of the local area, it should normally be constructed from building materials that match the main building.

Materials that are different from those of the main building can be used but only if they will complement the original materials. Careful consideration therefore needs to be taken when introducing different materials.

3.5.2 Finishing details

The architectural finishes and detailing found on a residential dwelling can give it a unique character and contributes to the appearance of the street. New development should, where appropriate, repeat architectural detailing on the existing building as they are important features that define the character of the building. For instance, the continuation of plinths and string courses, sills and lintels, decorative brickwork and quoins, barge boards and cornices, fascias and/or decorative tiling will help to make an extension complement the original building.

3.5.3 Chimneys

As well as their purpose as a vent for fireplaces or modern gas fires, chimney stacks and their pots can add character to a property and visual interest to the roofscape. Where they exist they should normally be retained when alterations are proposed and in some cases, where extensions are proposed, new ones included.

3.6 Principle six – Landscaping

Ask yourself: *What walls and fences are there and will these be affected by your proposal? Would any significant existing trees be harmed? What planting could you use to soften and incorporate the appearance of your proposal into the street scene?*

The standard: *Poorly designed schemes that harm the visual quality of an area through the loss of important landscape features, or inappropriate additions, will not be granted planning permission.*

3.6.1 Gates, walls, fences and hedges

Boundary treatments such as gates, walls, fences and hedges help to define private from public areas and can make a positive contribution to the character of an area. Existing boundaries that make a positive contribution should normally be preserved.

Where new boundary treatments are proposed they should:

1. Be of an appropriate scale and be constructed from building materials and styles that match or complement the street scene and local built environment.
2. Not harm the character of the area.

3.6.2 Trees

Healthy trees can make a positive contribution to the character of an area and should normally be retained. It is therefore important that trees are considered at an early design stage, before a planning application is submitted.

When considering a planning application, we will look to see if a development will impact upon trees, and if so, how you propose to minimise any impact. We will take into account the biodiversity and amenity value of the trees to help decide whether the trees should be retained or could be removed. You will need to ensure that the location of trees is accurately shown on the site plan and noted on the application form.

Some trees are protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) or by being located within a Conservation Area. You will normally require formal permission to undertake work to protected trees. You can find out if a tree is subject to a TPO or within a Conservation Area by using the **planning map** on our website. We also provide on our website advice about how to obtain permission to carry out works to protected trees where you can also find our "Bio-diversity and Trees" Supplementary Planning Document.

3.7 Principle seven – Other improvements

Ask yourself: *Is there anything about the existing house, its associated buildings or garden that looks out of place? If so, consider how these can be improved or perhaps replaced.*

The standard: *You are encouraged to seek opportunities to improve the appearance of your property.*

Whilst you are undertaking significant works to your property it is an ideal opportunity to ask your builder to make some minor improvements. You could remove previous alterations which detract from the appearance and sale value of your property and repair other features that need to be retained. For example you may have an old satellite dish that needs to be removed, an old broken fence panel along a boundary that needs replacing or an old extension that needs to be repaired. It is often cheaper to undertake repair works when you are constructing your extension.

4. Extensions in the Green Belt

This section includes a simple summary of how Green Belt policy relates to making alterations to existing dwellings. The Green Belt policy RD/3 of the North Somerset Replacement Local Plan can be found on our website.

If you need planning permission the scope for extending your house within the Green Belt is more limited than in other areas. In the Green Belt extensions that are “disproportionate” in size in relation to the original house will not normally be permitted. Our local plan defines the “original house” as being how it existed on 26 July 1985. If it was built after that date we will base our assessment on the house as it was first built.

An extension to a house will not normally be regarded as disproportionate if it does not exceed 50% of the gross floor area of the original house (see definition above) **and** its bulk and scale would appear smaller than the original building and it would not be visually prominent within the landscape. Account will also be taken of the design and siting of the proposed extension, the visual character of the site and its surroundings, the prominence, visual and physical impact of the extension, the effect of the proposal on the open and rural character of the area in general and the overall scale of the development on the site.

When we calculate the gross floor areas of the original house we:

1. Measure to the external face of the walls on all floors.
2. Include in the calculations areas such as internal partitions, voids and chimney breasts.
3. Include in the calculations areas such as balconies and car ports where floor-space is enclosed in some way to provide a built structure.
4. Include in the calculations all extensions constructed before 26th July 1985.
5. Exclude the floor area of loft/attic and basement areas provided they that do not have a permanent and fixed means of access such as a stair case. These areas will be included in the calculation if they had a fixed means of access when the house was first constructed or prior to 26 July 1985.

When we calculate the gross floor area of the proposed extension we use the same method described above at items 1) to 3) and we:

1. Include in the calculations all existing extensions (unless it was constructed before 26th July 1985).
2. Include the floor area of loft/attic and basement areas that will have a permanent and fixed means of access such as a stair case or the ceiling height would be 1.6 metres or higher.
3. Include in the calculations the floor-space of any previous planning permissions that have not yet been built and remain valid.

Note that proposals to extend garden areas within the Green Belt will not normally be permitted. This means that extensions that are proposed outside of the existing boundaries of your property will not normally be allowed in the Green Belt.

New outbuildings, such as garages, are normally expected to be subservient to the original building and not visually prominent within the landscape.

5. Listed buildings and conservation areas

Some older houses have statutory protection as 'listed buildings'. In addition a number of local areas have been designated as Conservation Areas because of their special character or appearance. Stricter planning regulations and controls apply to both listed buildings for internal and external works, and in Conservation Areas for development that affect their setting. This means that a different approach may need to be taken for these historic areas and buildings.

You can find out where all the listed buildings and conservation areas are in North Somerset by viewing our interactive **planning map** on the council website.

5.1 Windows in historic buildings

We have prepared advice to help people who own an historic building and want to alter the windows or doors. This advice can be found on our website.

5.1.2 Advice about Listed Buildings

We offer a pre-application advice service for people who want to alter Listed Buildings. There is normally a small fee. Full details of this service can be found on our website.

This publication is available in large print,
Braille or audio formats on request.

Help is also available for people who
require council information in languages
other than English.

Please contact **01275 888 811**.