South Gloucestershire Council

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HOUSEHOLDER DESIGN GUIDE

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

ADOPTED MARCH 2021

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South Gloucestershire Council
Householder Design Guide
Supplementary Planning Document Adopted March 2021

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FOREWORD

It is often tempting to consider applications for householder proposals as being insignificant in the wider context of the built environment of South Gloucestershire and so not worthy of detailed consideration. However, each year applications for residential extensions and other alterations to dwellings (hereafter referred to as "householder proposals") comprise a large proportion of the planning applications dealt with by South Gloucestershire Council. Proposals to alter or extend residential properties also make up a significant number of the enquiries and pre-application submissions received.

The importance of householder proposals is not just a matter of volume, as in reality, no proposal is too small to have some effect on its surroundings and so whether individually and cumulatively, residential extensions and alterations can have a major impact upon our ever-changing townscape. Designed well, alterations and extensions can harmonise with the character of the home (or host building) and help promote or reinforce a sense of local distinctiveness in the interests of the wider context, as well as providing precious additional living space. Designed badly, rather than complement and enhance its host and its surroundings, a poorly conceived design would only serve to detract from the quality of the local environment and could set a precedent that sees a wider degradation in the character and identity of an area. It is, therefore, in the interests of both the mature suburbs and the emerging new neighbourhoods that a high standard of design is always delivered to help sustain and enhance the quality of the built environment of South Gloucestershire.

The impact of a householder proposal is also felt not only as a physical change to the built environment, but also in terms of the effect on the amenity of neighbouring residents. Consequently when assessing any householder proposals there are considered to be three interests which will need to be balanced. These are:

1. the interests of the homeowner;

2. visual amenity - the impact on the character of the existing building and surrounding context which includes existing landscape features; and

3. residential amenity - the impact on the amenity levels of any neighbouring properties.

This document seeks to explain in detail how the issues of visual and residential amenity will be assessed to ensure when any application or enquiry for householder development is submitted for consideration, the interests of the homeowner are balanced against the interests of design of the host building and the characteristics of its surroundings, and the need to safeguard the amenities of neighbouring residents.

PART 1: **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 BACKGROUND

This householder design guide supplementary planning document (SPD) seeks to further clarify and expand on the design guidance and policy requirements set out under policy PSP38 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Policies, Sites and Places Plan (Adopted 2017). The design guidance contained within this SPD will also help underpin the Council's policy on promoting local distinctiveness as set out within policy PSP1.

This SPD also seeks to set out in more detail the relevant tools that will be used to assess the impact of any development proposal on the existing levels of residential amenity as required as part of the assessment of any scheme under policy PSP8. This adopted guidance will also update and supersede the residential amenity guidance contained within the 2016 "Assessing Residential Amenity" Technical Advice Note.

This SPD has been adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) as amended. It forms part of the Local Development Framework and as an adopted document it is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

1.2 POLICY CONTEXT

The Council requires all householder proposals to be of a high design quality, to be well designed and built to a high standard in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. Policy CS1 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Core Strategy (Adopted 2013) requires the highest possible standards of design and site planning are achieved and policy PSP38 "Development Within Existing Residential Curtilages, Including Extensions and New Dwellings" of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Policies, Sites and Places DPD (Adopted November 2017) provides more detailed design guidance in how the requirements of the policy could be met when applications for residential extensions and all development within residential curtilages are being considered.

Policy PSP8 "Residential Amenity" states that development would only be considered acceptable where it would not create unacceptable living conditions or have an unacceptable impact on the amenities of neighbouring properties. As noted above, this document will set out a series of guidelines on how the impact of any proposal on the existing levels of residential amenity will be assessed.

1.3 PURPOSE

This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) builds upon the primary aim of securing design quality and protecting residential amenity by defining the Council's expectations for residential extensions and alterations. This document therefore seeks to ensure the design quality of householder proposals is of a high standard by providing detailed guidance on a number of key design guidelines and scale parameters that any householder scheme will be expected to demonstrate compliance with. Conversely, proposals that are considered not to deliver a high quality design and do not positively respond to context and character will not be acceptable and the guidance contained within this document will be used to demonstrate instances of poor design and potentially justify a refusal of planning permission.

This guidance is intended for use by all parties involved in the process of designing and managing change in the built environment, from residents, their agents and architects, to planning officers and elected Members. Moreover, with the guidance in the form of a Supplementary Planning Document, this SPD will be afforded significant weight as a material consideration in determining planning applications.

The guidelines contained within this document will apply to all householder proposals to ensure the design and scale does not conflict with the existing dwelling, its context, or the existing levels of amenity currently enjoyed by neighbouring properties. South Gloucestershire Council encourages innovation and will consider the merits of alternative, more sustainable materials and contemporary design options. Any such proposal however must be sympathetic to local context, character, and site coverage in accordance with policy PSP38. The Council's aspirations to deliver a number of "Urban Living" designated areas that will be established within a future plan policy to allow for a densification of existing and proposed neighbourhoods could also have a bearing on the application of the guidance contained within this document.

1.4 CONTENTS AND LAYOUT

As noted within the foreword, the various aspects of the environmental impact of any householder proposals can be categorised into issues of "visual amenity" and "residential amenity".

Part 2 of this document will look to cover the issues concerning "Visual Amenity". It will set out first the general design guidance principles that should be applied to all residential extensions and alterations with a detailed discussion of the considered most significant design aspects. There will then be a more detailed set of guidance given for each common householder proposals. i.e. rear, side and front extensions as well as other alterations such as dormer extensions.

Part 3 of this document will cover "Residential Amenity" and will set out all the general guidelines that aim to ensure the existing levels of residential amenity currently enjoyed by neighbouring properties are not harmed through any residential extensions or alterations.

The guidance this document contains is not intended as hard and fast rules but is guidance that stems from good practice, practical experience and previous decisions made by South Gloucestershire Council and the Planning Inspectorate.

The key guidelines for anyone involved in residential alterations is contained within highlighted boxes.

Sustainability Assessment (SA) have been undertaken for this SPD and copies may be viewed at the Council Offices and on the Council's website.

1.5 PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT

This guide sets out general requirements to assist those seeking planning permission but is also a useful tool to ensure the quality of design for those schemes that fall within permitted development. Current legislation does not provide development rights for flats and in some cases, permitted development rights for dwellings have been removed or restricted.

If there are any concerns regarding whether or not a proposal is permitted development or not, advice from South Gloucestershire Council should be sought. More general advice can be found on the Office of Public Sector Information website: www.planningportal.co.uk.

1.6 LANDSCAPE FEATURES, DESIGNATED AREAS AND HISTORIC ASSETS

Trees

Consideration should be given at the design stage of any development to the adequate distancing between an extension and mature trees and hedging to avoid subsequent vegetation loss due to concerns over loss of light and allow sufficient spacing for future growth to maturity. In circumstances where trees (including canopies and root structures) are like to be affected by a proposed extension or hardstanding, a tree survey, and a protection plan will need to be submitted with any application.

Certain trees are however protected and these fall into two categories. The first is a "Tree Preservation Order" (TPO) which is an Order made by the Council in respect of a tree or multiple trees because they are considered to bring amenity value to the surrounding area. This order makes it an offence to cut down, uproot, prune, lop or damage the tree in question without first obtaining the Council's consent or having a valid planning permission that allows such works as part of the approved development. A TPO can be applied to a single tree, a group of trees or a woodland.

The second category of tree protection is for trees within conservation areas. Trees form an important feature within conservation areas and loss of tree cover can have a detrimental impact upon the appearance of the area. Any trees measuring over 7.5cm diameter at a height of 1.5m from the ground within a conservation area are protected under government legislation from being topped, lopped, or felled without first giving the Local Planning Authority six weeks notice.

To find out whether a tree or trees are protected by a TPO or location within a conservation area, please contact the Council's Development Management service on 01454 868004.

The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Extensions to dwellings within the open countryside and the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty must have special regard to the unique character of the surroundings and the host building. Under PSP2 "Landscape", it states that for any development within the AONB, "great weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the natural and scenic beauty of the landscape whilst taking account of the biodiversity interest and the historic and cultural heritage".

Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings

The Council has a responsibility, in making decisions, to pay special attention to the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and to the preservation of listed buildings or their settings under the Planning (Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings) Act 1990. Where proposals relate to a conservation area and/or listed buildings, or are likely to impact the setting of a conservation area and/or listed building, design solutions that are sensitive to both the building and the surrounding area are required. Development in conservation areas and works to a listed building must accord with policy PSP17 and CS9.

The guidance contained within this document is intended to address the general amenity and character considerations associated with householder development. However, where there is a conflict between these guidelines and conservation area or listed building considerations, the latter considerations will prevail.

Listed buildings, buildings within the Council's 29 Conservation Areas and buildings within the AONB fall under different categories of permitted development and other restrictions and may require additional consents. The locations of all listed building, conservation areas and the AONB can be viewed on the Council's website on the interactive constraints maps at http://map.n-somerset.gov.uk/southglos.html

1.7 PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

South Gloucestershire Council offers a pre-application service to give a more detailed, tailored advice prior to a formal planning submission. This is useful for those seeking advice or potential alterations to a property not yet owned. For further information contact South Gloucestershire Council or visit www.southglos.gov.uk.

1.8 LAND OWNERSHIP

An extension built close to or on a boundary, may require access to the neighbour's property for construction and maintenance. If any part of the extension extends beyond the applicant's ownership (i.e. foundations or overhanging eaves), the neighbour's consent will be required and notification of this must be made within an application. This may not be acceptable to the neighbouring landowner, but without their consent, it is not possible to build any extension that projects into a neighbour's land even if planning permission is granted.

In order to avoid delay in dealing with applications, it is important that applicants and agents provide accurate plans depicting the precise position of boundaries, neighbouring dwellings and the openings within them.

It is also advisable before submission of a formal application, a dialogue takes place between the applicant or their agent and any neighbours that may be affected by the proposal. This can ease the formal consultation process that will follow and eliminate any undue concerns.

For further information about carrying out work near neighbouring buildings refer to the booklet "The Party Wall Act" 1996 available to view at www.gov.uk/party-walls-building-works.

PART 2: **VISUAL AMENITY**

2.1 GENERAL DESIGN GUIDANCE PRINCIPLES

The "General Design Guidance Principles" listed below apply to all residential extensions and alterations and are intended to help any householder proposals address the key requirements regarding residential amenity and design set within policy PSP8 and policy PSP38. PSP1 and CS1 are also relevant, as compliance with the relevant design principles will also help achieve a design response that helps reinforce local distinctiveness.

GENERAL DESIGN GUIDANCE PRINCIPLES:

All extensions and alterations should aim to :-

i. Be of an overall high quality design;

ii. Achieve successful integration by reflecting the characteristics of the existing dwelling by:

- Comprising of windows and door openings that relate to the existing house in terms of proportions, size, shape, materials, alignment, and style to aid integration;
- Comprising of materials and detailing that harmonise and correspond with the existing dwelling and protect and reflect existing architectural details;

iii. Be subservient in scale and character to ensure the prominence of the existing building is preserved;

iv. Respond constructively to the characteristics of the prevailing street scene that are considered to make a positive contribution to the distinctiveness of the locality;

v. Safeguard landscape features that make a positive contribution to the character and distinctiveness of the locality, e.g. mature planting/ trees and boundary treatments.

vi. Safeguard the amenities of neighbouring residents in terms of daylight, sunlight, privacy (both direct and perceived), visual intrusion, nuisance and security;

vii. Safeguard the access, car parking and servicing required for the extended dwelling;

viii. Preserve or enhance bio-diversity by ensuring existing site features including water courses and associated flood risk zones, or open spaces are retained and protected.

To help provide for a greater understanding of what is required by each of the design principles listed above and their implications, the key design principles will now be discussed in more detail under the following topic area headings below with diagrams and illustrations used to illustrate good and bad examples.

High Quality Design

As set out within policy PSP1, PSP38 and CS1, the Council is committed to achieving high quality design for all development proposals. The need to achieve a high quality design should an overriding consideration for all development regardless of how prominent or accessible the site is.

The quality of a site's context can also be used to lower the quality of any development proposal, i.e. a poor context justifies a poor or mediocre design, but this stance should not be accepted as the promotion of further poor design would only serve to exacerbate the poor quality built environment. In contrast it should be considered that if the context is regarded as being of little architectural merit or aesthetic distinction, this should be even more the reason to maximise the opportunities to raise the standard of design and appearance in the area. In time this could set a precedent for good design which could see a positive impact on the character and identity of the locality in the long-term. Overall, the character, distinctiveness and viability of an area often lies in the quality of its built environment and so achieving the highest possible standard of design and site planning should always be the objective, as required by policy CS1.

Although many properties are similar, it is recognised that none can be considered exactly the same. These "General Design Guidance Principles" will be applied with the understanding that different circumstances – such as orientation or changes in level, may require different approaches.

Therefore, while site specific circumstances will need to be taken into consideration, the overall objective should be achieving high quality design. What this means in the context of householder proposals and how this can be achieved is often misunderstood. As now explained under the following headings, there are some key design principles that have to be followed as part of achieving good design.

Integration and Subservience

Good design for householder proposals means any extension should reflect or respect the design and scale of the original building and have regard also to the characteristics of its locality. This is achieved through consideration of scale, form, proportions, materials and detailing to ensure any extension does not appear as a discordant nor dominating addition that can be harmful to the character of the host building and detract from the quality of the street scene. The objective should therefore be an extension that is subordinate in scale and through consideration of matters of detailed design, can be seen to integrate or be considered "in-keeping" with the character of its host.

Fig.1 How design and scale can help aid successful integration

Fig.2 Discordance v Harmony - good design means respecting the prevailing character and forms of the host building so that any extension can be considered to be a positive or complementary addition.

In some cases there will be insufficient space to meet the expectations of the homeowner or potentially enable any extension at all. Conversely in some instances the size of the plot may appear to lend itself to a larger development, but the scale and design of any extension should still remain in proportion and subordinate to the host building. Therefore, while the site may be able to accommodate such an extension, the scale of any extension should not be allowed to subsume its host. The overdevelopment of plots can also have implications for street patterns and plot layouts where they form a distinctive feature of the locality.

Fig.3 By ensuring scale and massing of any side or rear extension remains subservient (i.e. for two images from the left), the original character and form of the host can remain perceptible and not as shown (on the example to the right), subsumed and lost by a scale of development that dominates its host.

Proportions

When considering proportions for householder proposals, this will primarily relate to the design and scale of the existing openings.

Whether individually or collectively as a pattern (referred to as "fenestration"), the windows of a building can make a significant contribution to its aesthetic character. The relationship of the openings to the walls in which they are set can be referred to as the "solid-to-void" ratio.

In accordance with PSP38, it will be essential that new doors or windows as part of any addition adhere to the character of the existing house and potentially the surrounding neighbours. Regard should therefore be given to the size, design, shape, position and materials of the existing windows and doors, but also the "solid-to-void" ratio to ensure the overall proportions of any extension are appropriate. By understanding the proportions of the existing building, this helps provide a strong clue as the appropriate proportion for the extension itself, as a failure to reflect the proportions or "solid-to-void" ratio of an existing building often betrays an extension as being out of scale with its host. Below is a simple guide as to how the existing proportions of a building can be assessed and used to inform an extension.

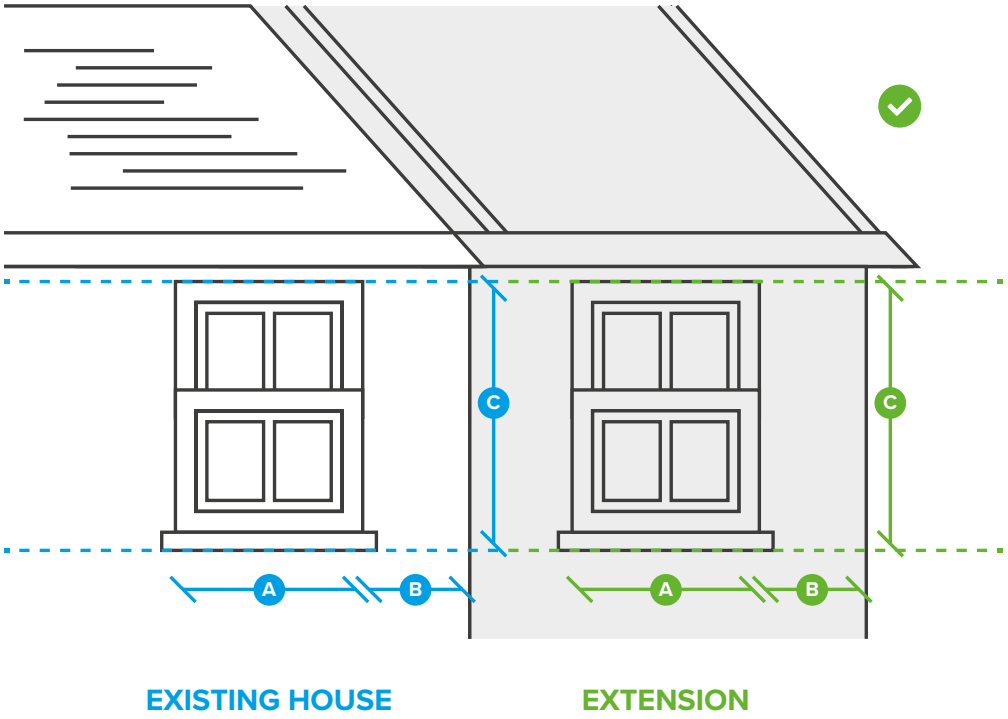

Fig.4 To help integration, attention to proportions is often key and so the dimensions of A, B and C for the existing should be applied to any proposed extension to ensure a good level of design is achieved.

Detailing and Materials

External materials, finishes and architectural features all affect how any extension will look. To help promote assimilation with the host property as well as helping to reinforce local distinctiveness in accordance with PSP1 and PSP38, the detailing and materials used in any extension should match those of the host building. Therefore, along with main facing materials (brick or render for example), detailing such as string courses, brick patterns (including mortar joints), quoins, cills and exposed lintels which may be present on a host building should be carried across to any extension to aid integration.

While reflecting the characteristics of any host building gin the design of any extension is an overriding principle to follow, in some case care will need to be taken to ensure the prominence of the host building is maintained by ensuring the extension appears subordinate not just in scale but also in character. Consequently, although materials and detailing should be carried across from a host to any extension, if architectural embellishments such as bay windows, chimneys, raised parapets or coped verges are present on the host building, incorporating these features into the design of any extension needs to be carefully considered, as the result could be an extension that visually competes with its host and distorts the ability to perceive the phased development of the building. Therefore, although incorporating these features may be seen as a way in helping to integrate any extension, if not considered carefully the result could be an extension that only serves to diminish the prominence of the host when the key objective should be an extension that is deferential in character in all regards.

Fig.5 Matching materials ensures a successful assimilation of any extension with the host building.

In light of the importance of matching the materials for any extension or development within a curtilage with the host building or prevailing material in the context, precise details of the materials should be confirmed on submission or could be subject to a condition requiring a separate submission and an additional fee to be discharged.

Access, Parking and Serving

An over-intensification of the existing residential use through an extension or alteration, may result in an unacceptable deficit in the service requirements for the property, contrary to policy PSP38 and other policies and guidance. This may be in terms of car parking, storage space for refuse and recycling or even external amenity space. This can also impinge on the overall function of the area, affect highway safety and diminish the attractiveness of the neighbourhood. South Gloucestershire Council's current parking standards are set within the Policy PSP16.

Landscape Features and Bio-diversity

Existing features such as trees, hedges, streams as well as incidental areas of open space often provide an important contribution to an area's character and appearance. The retention of vegetation, water features and spaces can reduce the impact of development by providing a visual screen or break and can also support the bio-diversity of the general area.

The impact of a development or alteration on the existing biodiversity or site features is a key consideration in assessing a proposal in accordance with policy PSP19. Any extension that would result in the loss or cause harm to important vegetation, protected species and their foraging areas, or that comprise of site features such as watercourses and their associated flood risk zones will not be permitted.

2.2 PROPOSED REAR EXTENSIONS

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 primary consideration for single and two-storey rear extensions is the impact upon the rear amenity space and the amenity of a neighbouring property. This is particularly significant when the extension would be at or near the property boundary.

To ensure privacy and light to neighbouring properties is protected and visual intrusion and nuisance is minimised, standards for rear extensions are generally applied in conjunction with the General Design Guidance Principles in Part 2.1 on page 9. In some cases these may not be sufficient for this purpose and in other cases more generous standards may be possible. Each application will be judged on a case-by-case basis but the guidelines given below are good practice established over time.

The following design guidelines are specifically for rear extensions and they should also be considered in combination with the General Design Guidance Principles and the residential amenity standards set out later in this document.

ALL REAR EXTENSIONS SHOULD ADHERE TO ALL THE FOLLOWING DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

- Shall remain visually subservient to the host building in terms of scale and character;
- To aid integration as well as protect the amenities of neighbouring properties, two-storey rear extensions in most cases should not exceed 4 metres in depth;
- All roofs should reflect the character, pitch and form of the host building to aid integration;
- Any wall formed on a shared boundary should not contain openings;
- The side walls of the rear extension should not extend beyond the side walls of the host building;
- In the interests of retaining the proportions and character of the host building, a 150mm minimum gap between the ridge of a single storey extension mono-pitched roof and the cill of the first floor window above should be achieved; and
- Should also comply with the “7 metre” garden boundary test – see Residential Amenity section.

These key design principles for **rear extensions** will now be discussed in more detail.

Subservience for Rear Extensions

In addition to the need for a subservient scale and mass, the ridge of any rear extension should also be set down from the ridge of the main roof and the eaves of the extension should be level with its host. Regard to proportions will also need to be considered as often although the roof ridge of an extension might be set down from the ridge of the main house, by virtue of excessive width, the proportions appear out of character. Excessive width can also lead to an uncharacteristic low pitched roof and the result can be an ungainly extension that appears squat or stocky in character with expansive areas of blank elevation between and to the side of the proposed openings. This can be remedied by reducing the width which allows for now only an improvement in proportions, but also allows for an increase in roof pitch to help match the extension's roof with its host. This might also require the eaves of the extension to be set below the eaves of the host building.

- Two storey/first floor extensions shall remain visually subservient and respond well to the overall scale and form of the original/parent building.

Fig.6 Appropriate scales and massing for rear extensions.

Maximum Rear Extension Depths

The depth of any rear extension is a key consideration when assessing the visual impact of the extension on its host as well as assessing the impact on the existing levels of residential amenity currently enjoyed by neighbouring properties. The nature of the host building is also an important consideration, as the impact of any rear extension on visual or residential amenity will differ if the host building is detached, semi-detached or terraced, as for semi-detached houses the extension is likely to be close to one property boundary and an extension to a terraced property is likely to engage with both neighbouring properties.

The current provisions of permitted development rights set out the parameters of what is permissible without the need for planning permission, but where permission is required (which might be a result of existing extensions, site characteristics or the designation of the land), it is considered justifiable to use as a guide the following maximum depths for rear extensions in the interests of visual and residential amenity levels.

- 5m length for single storey at or near the property boundary
- 4m length for 2-storey or first floor extension

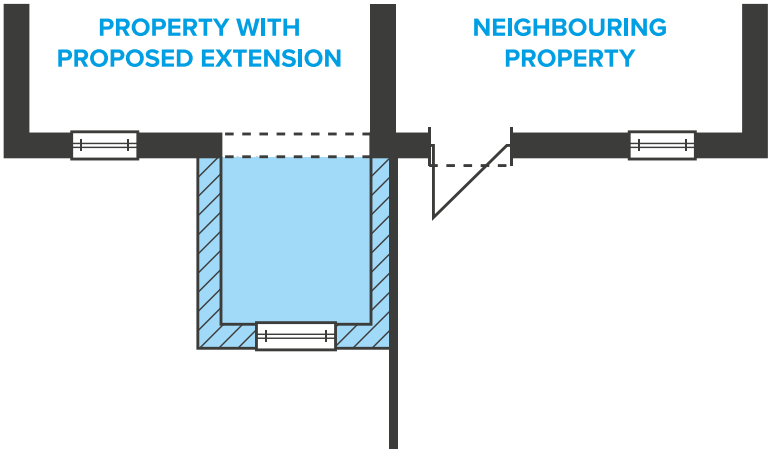

Fig.7 Recommended maximum depths for rear extensions.

While the impact of any rear extension on the existing neighbours is a key residential amenity consideration, what is often overlooked when extensions are being considered is the impact upon the internal living conditions within the host building, as a substantial extension to the an existing room can reduce the amount of natural light received inside the extended property, resulting in a tunnelling effect within the house.

The design of rear extensions should also take into account the suggested separation distances and 45 degree rule (see Residential Amenity section), but in addition, as noted above for two storey rear extensions the guidance of maximum lengths should be considered. Adherence to the maximum depths especially for two-storey extensions help make sure rear extensions are in keeping with the scale, character and form of the host dwellings and appear as subordinate extensions. A substantial projecting rear wing or extension could not only result in a large blank elevation that is out of character with the scale, massing and proportions of the host building, it could also result in a visually intrusive and over-bearing impact on the gardens of neighbouring properties and the visual enclosure of primary habitable room windows. Therefore, in the interests of both appearance and protecting the amenities of neighbouring properties, two-storey extensions especially should not exceed 4 metres in depth. If they are to be built directly on the boundary with primary habitable rooms directly adjacent, then as per the "45 degree rule", it may be even 4 metres would cause the residential amenity issues identified and so 4 metres should be considered a starting point but might need to be reduced depending on the relationship with the neighbouring properties.

Building on Shared Boundaries

The side walls of any extension including conservatories, at or near to a property boundary that is shared with a neighbouring property should be formed from a solid finished wall that requires little or no maintenance. There should also be no windows within this boundary wall to ensure privacy to both parties in accordance with policy PSP8.

Fig.8 Extensions should be contained within existing boundaries and side elevations should be blank.

Side Walls

The side walls of rear extensions should not extend beyond the existing side walls of the existing dwellinghouse. Although this may provide additional internal living space, the resultant built form is not usually acceptable or in keeping with the character of the host building or the street scene.

Fig.9 When building to the rear, any extension should follow or be contained within the existing building lines.

2.3 SIDE EXTENSIONS

This section covers all side extensions including attached garages and it should be read in conjunction with the General Design Guidance Principles. Set out below are the specific key design principles for side extensions:

ALL SIDE EXTENSIONS SHOULD ADHERE TO ALL THE FOLLOWING DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

- Be subservient in character and scale to its host by:
  - **i.** Extending to no more than half the width of the principal elevation. To be in true proportion, in most cases this would see an extension a third of the width of the principal/ front elevation;
  - **ii.** Setting back the side extension at least 300mm from the building line of the principal elevation of the dwelling;
  - **iii.** Setting down the ridge and eaves height of any extension below the level of existing roof ridge and eaves of the host building;
- The existing characteristics of its host should be incorporated to aid integration, for roof form;
- Ensure the external side wall is parallel with the existing side wall of the dwelling;
- For corner plots, any extension should respect existing building lines of adjacent roads and so should not extend beyond the building lines of neighbouring properties;
- Resist the terracing effect of properties through consideration of scale and design to mitigate the visual impact;
- Ensure a minimum clearance of 75mm between the eaves of the extension and the boundary.

These key design principles for side extensions will now be discussed in more detail.

Subservience for Side Extensions

Oversized side extensions can cause significance disruption to the balance of the host building, harm its character and appearance and detract from the general street scene. Whilst maximising internal space is an understandable objective of the homeowner, the width of any side extension along with form and detailing will be of primary importance in assessing the quality of the design of the extension in accordance with policy PSP38.

As noted above in the 'Design Principles For Side Extensions', any side extension should not be more than half the width of the front elevation of the house it is being attached to. To further help the host building retain its prominence, it will in most cases be appropriate to set any side extension back from the principal façade and down from the main ridge level.

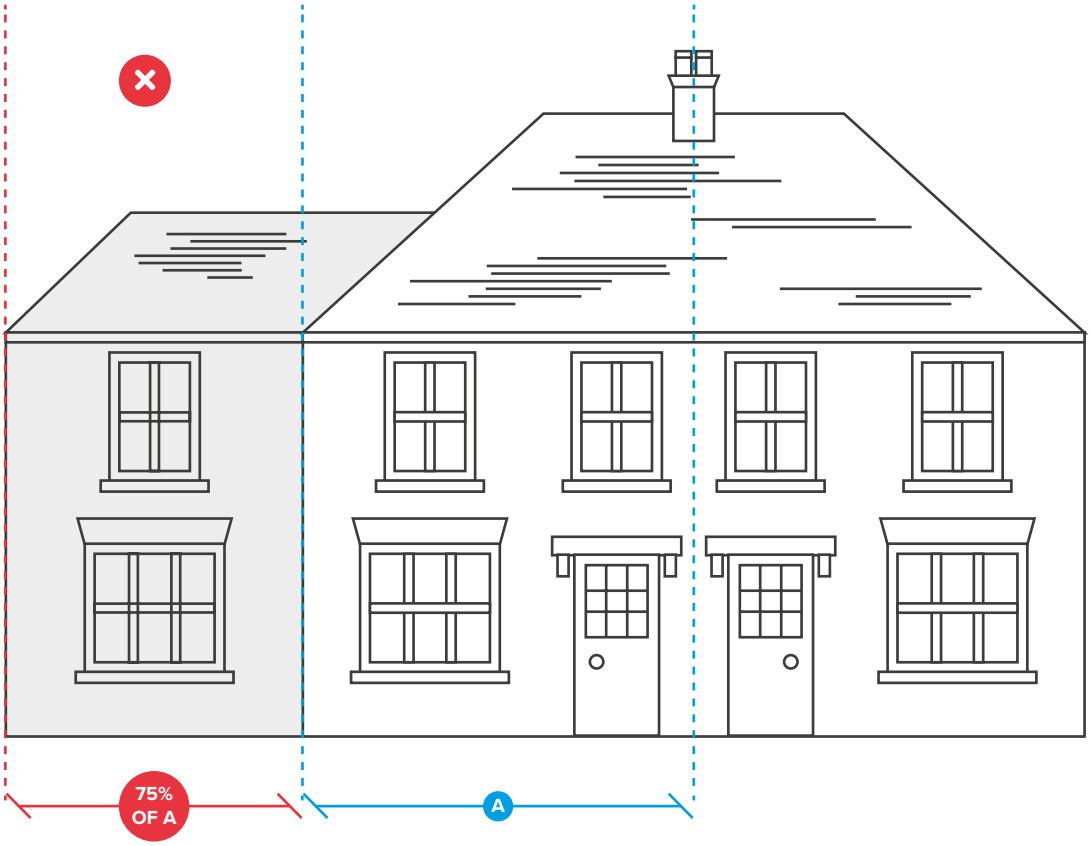

Fig.10 This extension is wider than half the original width (approximately 75%) with the result is out of proportion with its host and results in a visual imbalance in a pair of semi-detached houses.

A high quality design for a side extension therefore requires a comprehensive approach to subservience and set out below is further guidance on how this can be achieved.

"Setting Back" of Side Extensions

A two-storey or first floor side extension should be set back a minimum of 300mm from the principal elevation to allow the original form of the building to remain apparent and help retain the rhythm of the street in accordance with policy PSP38.

There will be cases where even a larger set back from the front elevation will not be enough to prevent an unacceptable effect on the dwelling's appearance or the area's character. In some instances due to the style of the dwellinghouse a setback may not be appropriate. Each case must be treated on its merits but in the majority of instances, the need for subservience is appropriate and a "set-back" will from part of a package of measures to ensure subservience and integration are achieved successfully as part of promoting high quality design.

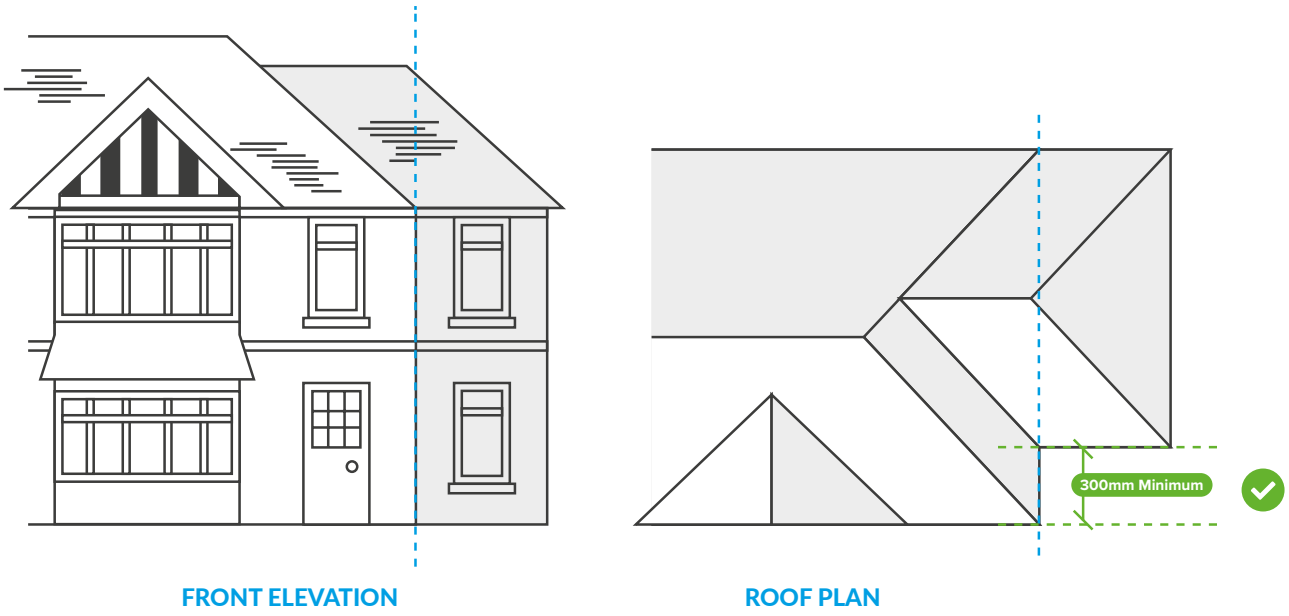

Fig.11 300mm minimum set back in elevation.

"Setting Down" of Side Extensions

To ensure the proposed extension is not too dominant or out of scale or proportion with its host, the ridge height of any extension should be at least 300mm below the ridge height of the existing property. To accord with the General Design Guidance Principles, the roof pitch of the extension must match the pitch of the host. Similarly, the eaves of the extension should respect that of the existing property and be at the same level or ideally just below.

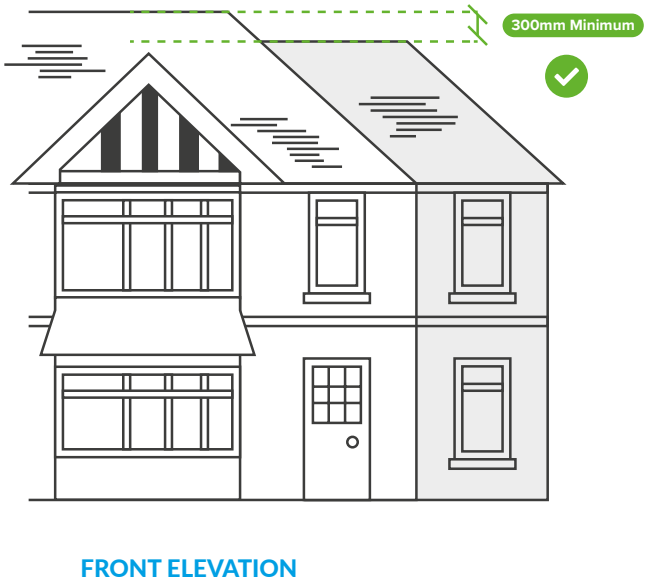

Fig.12 Setting down of ridge to aid integration and subservience.

Fig.13 A good example of an extension that follows all the key design principles of scale in terms of width, is set both "down" and "back" and carries across the hip end roof.

Proportions for Side Extensions

As noted under the General Design Guidance Principles, there is a need to have regard to the existing proportions of the original building. This is mostly expressed in the "solid-to-void ratio", the ratio of solid walls to windows/ openings. It is therefore important that any new windows within a proposed side extension should repeat the design and scale of the existing windows within the host building but also have regard the proportions that contribute to the composition of the elevation. Understanding the existing proportions of the host building and looking to carry them across for any side extension will also provide a strong clue as to the appropriate proportion and scale of any proposed extension.

In most cases having regard to maintaining the proportions of the host building will result in any new windows being centrally positioned within any new extension with the same separation distances and off-set distances of the existing windows from each other and the side elevation return respectively.

Fig.14 Consideration of proportions is even important for limited single storey side extension.

Building In-Line

Although the internal space may be increased by maximising the footprint of a side extension, this is not usually a good design solution, as it often leaves an extension appearing as a contrived, disparate addition to the building and street scene generally. Such proposals are likely to be considered contrary to policy PSP38.

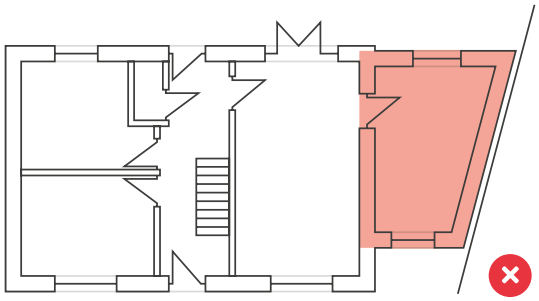

Fig.15 Here a proposed side extension that looks to maximise developable area and footprint to the detriment of design and form. In the desire to let functional requirements override the consideration of aesthetics, the form of the extension would be at odds with that of its host dwelling.

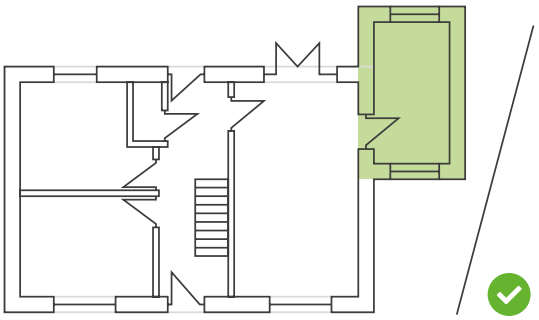

Fig.16 The side extension here instead looks to reflect the form of the main house. In contrast the side extension here is in keeping with the shape of the dwelling without causing harm to the street scene. The side access is also maintained.

Building Lines

An extension on a corner plot for example may be visible within two streets and it is important that along with being subservient to the host building, it is also respectful to the street scene. To ensure there is no unacceptable visual intrusion, any side extension on a corner plot must be set behind the building lines of properties on both streets and adhere to the width criteria noted above. Dominant, elongated side extensions that extend beyond the building line or seek to fill the space between two dwellings will be considered contrary to policies PSP38 and CS1.

The side wall of an extension should run parallel to the original side of the house to respect the established character of the property and ensure the integrity of the street scene is maintained.

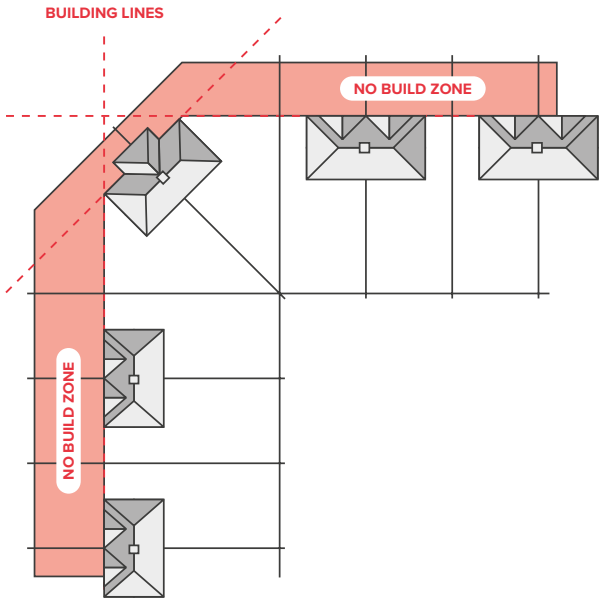

Fig.17 Regard to existing building lines will also form part of the consideration of any side extension.

Minimum Separation Gaps

A minimum gap of 75mm from the furthest extreme of the extension (including guttering/ facias) to the boundary with the neighbouring property will be expected. This should result in a combined separation distance of 150mm for semi-detached properties. Such a separation is intended to ensure that visually the individual properties retain their independent form, but also to provide adequate space for future maintenance of the extension and elements such as guttering, facia and soffits boards.

Gaps and views between the buildings give a spacious, more open appearance to an area and provides rhythm to a street contributing to an area's character. Even in areas of relatively high density, a sense of openness may prevail owing to the spaces between buildings along a frontage. Filling in these breaks in the frontage can lead to a "terracing effect" which results in a massing and appearance that is unsympathetic to the general character of both the host building and its context. Although there are many examples within the authority where this has taken place, rather than be considered precedential, greater care is now required to ensure the harm is not exacerbated in the interests of safeguarding the character and distinctiveness of the area. Consequently, in the most severe cases where no attempt to mitigate the impact (as discussed below), refusal will be likely on the grounds of failure to comply with policy PSP38.

Fig.18 How the gaps between buildings can make a positive and material contribution to the street scene and are thus worthy of consideration and protection.

Fig.19 By achieving subservience through following the design principles noted above – i.e. regard to scale (width) and "setting down and back", the terracing effect can be avoided.

A "terracing effect" can be harmful to the character and identity of a locality. It can also result in tunnelling effect between existing properties enclosing views and reducing natural light to both primary habitable windows but also rear garden areas, which could potentially be considered contrary to policy PSP8 residential amenity.

Any side extension that looks to wrap around the rear elevation should also look to comply with the guidance for rear extensions set out within the previous section.

2.4 FRONT EXTENSIONS

The most important consideration for a front extension is likely to be its impact on the character and appearance of the dwellinghouse and the impact on the character of the surrounding area.

Like the two previous sections, the guidance set out below for front extensions should be read in conjunction with the General Design Guidance Principles.

ALL FRONT EXTENSIONS SHOULD ADHERE TO ALL THE FOLLOWING DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

- Any front extension should not dominate or be incongruous with the character of the host building by introducing a discordant or inharmonious element;
- Should not span the width of the front elevation or be of a scale or form that unbalances an existing facade where symmetry is an defined characteristic of the building –i.e. double fronted houses;
- Should not project beyond the front plane of any existing features such as bay windows;
- Should be set back from the front boundary with the street scene;
- Should retain clear views of a front entrance door from the street or not screen a neighbour's entrance in the interests of security.

Overall front extensions are largely unacceptable, particularly two storey and not at all where it would upset the character and rhythm of the street scene.

For front porches, where permitted development rights are exceeded and planning permission would be required, it will be treated as a front extension and the above guidance criteria will be applied.

Each issue raised by the above design principles for front extensions will now be discussed in more detail.

Character of the Host Dwelling

Front extensions have the greatest impact on the public façade of the host dwelling. A front extension should not dominate the existing façade, but size alone is not the only measure of whether a front extension is truly in harmony with the host dwelling. Even an extension that is subservient in size or massing can add an incongruous shape or form that is out of character with the front elevation of the dwelling or creates an unbalanced façade. This may be in the form of a gable end protruding out from an existing pitched roof, or a flat roof front extension attached to a more articulated façade.

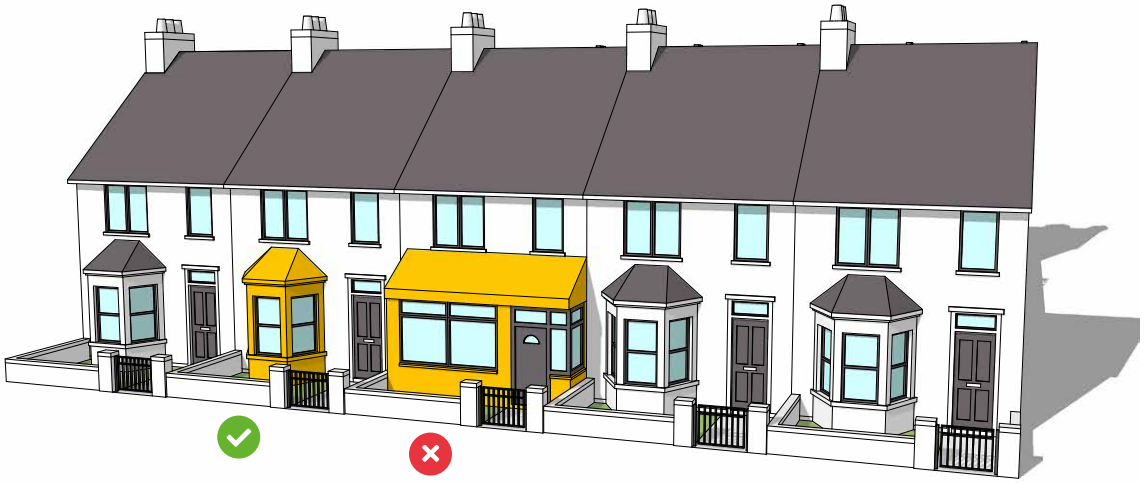

Fig.20 In areas especially where the characteristics of a front elevation are important to the host and may contribute to a character of the street – i.e. a common feature such as a bay window that helps provide rhythm, a front extension could be harmful.

Character of the Street Scene

A front extension may often result in a dominant or inharmonious addition to the general area or street scene. This may be particularly apparent in a unified street scene with a strong rhythm, but may equally apply in a street where each dwelling has an individual character. If a front extension is the first element of the façade that is noticed, this can adversely impact on the character of the street scene. For these reasons, front extensions are rarely appropriate.

Extensions that would adversely impact upon key elements of the character of area will not be accepted.

The Width of Any Front Extension

Front canopies or extensions that span the entire width of a property or dwelling will normally not be permitted unless such extensions form the predominant character of the street or host dwelling.

Fig.21 By having an extension that spans the width of a front elevation, the extension can introduce a dominant horizontal element that is out of keeping with the character of its host and surroundings.

Breaching the "Front Plane".

Front extensions should not adversely affect existing features such as bay windows or architectural elements such as string courses or quoins. Moreover, many front gardens especially to terraced properties are limited in scale and extensions built into this space close to the public realm are unlikely to be acceptable. This would be in particular the case where the new front extension would immediately abut the public highway to the front of the property leaving no defensible space.

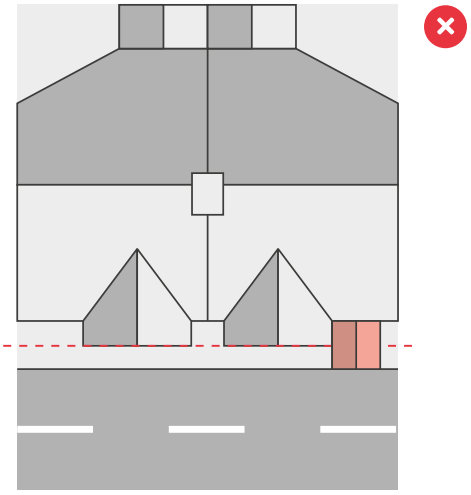

Fig.22 Here the extension would project beyond the existing building line and so would impact on the character of the host and the street scene.

Retention of Views to Points of Entry

In the consideration of any front extension, regard to ensuring existing views to points of entry are maintained should be given to aid casual surveillance from the streets in the interests of general security.

Views from the street to the front doors of properties should also be maintained wherever possible. High front walls, fences or the positioning of a garage or structure at the front of the property should be resisted to avoid the potential for criminal activity to be hidden from view.

Fig.23 The proposed front extension would impact on the existing surveillance onto the street.

Porches

Whether permitted development or not, as good design practice porches should be designed to integrate with the existing front elevation and not destroy any existing features around a front door where they exist. Porches that break up a frontage which has an identity centred on a uniform design or where existing door surrounds are an important feature of the street will not be permitted.

Small porches are often "permitted development" and do not require formal planning consent. For further information please refer to the Planning Portal (www.planningportal.gov.uk)

Fig.24 Along with regard to width and depth, the simple addition of a pitched roof can help a porch integrate with the character of its host and set a positive precedent for neighbouring properties to follow.

2.5 ROOF EXTENSIONS AND DORMERS

Roof Extensions

The roof of a dwelling has a major impact on the character of the building and performs an important role within the wider street scene. Alterations to the main roof of the house by materially changing its form through changing pitch or raising roofline will not normally be permitted where planning permission is required and so for example, "gabling" off an existing hip roof will likely be refused planning permission. Where such works fall under permitted development provisions, then regard to the visual impact on both the host building and its surroundings should still be given. For example, as illustrated below additional accommodation could still be provided by a side dormer rather than "gabling off" the hipped end roof. This would leave the form of hipped roof intact along with the symmetry of the pair of houses and so in design terms, is a far superior option.

Fig.25 Proposals to "gable off" an existing hipped roof would upset the symmetry of a pairs of semi-detached dwelling. A side gable would be far more acceptable as it would retain the form of the house.

Dormers

Due to their elevated positions on buildings most dormers are likely to be prominent from the public realm. As an overarching good design principle, unless they form part of a prevailing architectural feature present on neighbouring properties, any proposal for the insertion of dormers to a front elevation would be unacceptable as they have the potential to not only harm the host dwelling but also detract from the quality of the surrounding area.

Side dormers may be considered less obtrusive, but they also can have a significant impact upon the form or shape of the roof and subsequent dwellinghouse and they could result in a discordant addition in views of the façade in its entirety and the wider street scene. It is uncommon for side dormers to be an established element within the character of an area or even form part of a design of an original dwelling and so where consent is required, they are often unacceptable due to their design, scale and position on the building. Along with scale, the key to a successful side dormer extension is therefore setting down the dormer form the ridge to avoid the "gabling off" of a hipped roof.

Due to their prominence the visual impact of any dormer is likely to be significance and so is the potential for harm due to inappropriate scale, form, materials and position. To help ensure basic good design principles are followed when a dormer is being considered, detailed guidance for dormers roof extensions is set out below which has been separated into the two categories of "traditional" pitched roofed or bonnet dormers and "box-type" flat roofed dormers.

Traditional dormers

Dormers were traditionally used to add light and allow for the perception of an increase in space. However, whether for a new house or as part of a loft conversion for an existing house, they are now used as an attempt to provide additional living accommodation within the roofspace. Looking to use a dormer to provide a material increase in additional living space has consequences on the scale and design of any dormer and its subsequent impact on the aesthetic character of its host. Often what is now proposed is an over-dominant feature within in the composition of the elevation when, as originally intended, they should be a limited or minor incident in the roof plane so as not to change the character or proportions of the host dwelling.

Fig.26 Although this dormer has interrupted the roof plane of the front elevation, the resultant visual impact is limited due to modest scale.

As can be seen in two previous photographs above, when the aspirations to maximise usable space are allowed to outweigh the regard to both the design of the host building and the quality of the surrounding environment, flat roofed dormers are often the result. These will be discussed in the next section and are generally considered poor design and unacceptable in policy terms but as now discussed, there is a more aesthetically appropriate alternative "traditional" dormer approach which potentially presents an opportunity to provide a dormer that can be considered complementary or in keeping with its host.

As part of complying with the need to achieve high quality design as set out within policy CS1 and PSP38, any proposed dormer should ensure it demonstrates regard to the characteristics of the host dwelling to aid integration and in relation to scale, it is not overbearing or a dominant. As a guiding principle dormers, especially to the front elevation, should be as limited in scale as practicably possible to ensure they are as visually recessive as they can be.

To help achieve these design objectives, set out below is a list of design guidance for traditional dormers.

ALL TRADITIONAL DORMERS SHOULD ADHERE TO ALL THE FOLLOWING DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

- Be sited 500mm below the main ridge;
- Be sited 500mm above eaves level;
- Include 500mm roof space between side cheek of any dormer and verge of roof;
- Should not extend across any more than 50% of the width of the roof plane;
- Be in character with the dwelling and its materials and aligned with existing windows below, or sited centrally and symmetrically;
- Be sited back from the face of principal elevation;
- Use matching roof materials;
- Avoid flat roofs.

Fig.27 This illustrates how the design guidance noted previously can be translated into a dormer design that can be considered to be in keeping or reflective of the characteristics of the host building. This may require incorporating existing architectural features such as a gable or pitched roof, or the general design of dormers within the street scene. The design of the glazing and openings should also reflect the existing architectural character as part of good design. The position of the dormers is also a critical part of ensuring that they integrate with the character, proportions or patterns of the fenestration of its host and so should be aligned with the existing windows below or alternatively if this is not appropriate, centrally positioned on an elevation. Regard to the "diminishing proportions" architectural principle could also be considered, i.e. the scale of the windows for any dormers is reduced in scale in contrast to the first floor windows.

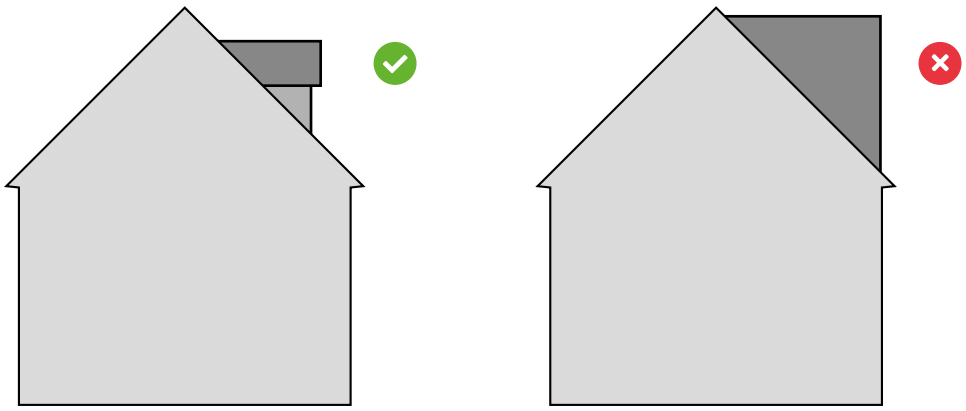

Fig.28 How in section should a dormer appear – set down from the main ridge and back from the eaves.

"Box-Type" Dormers

Flat-roofed box-type dormers are not normally considered appropriate where planning permission is required. While permitted development allowances have enabled these structure to appear in great numbers within South Gloucestershire, they do not represent good design and do not comply with the requirements of the Council's design polices and so in most cases they are not acceptable forms of development.

Therefore, although something of a common feature, the insertion of box dormers has caused a significant and harmful level of intrusion into the existing roofscape in parts of South Gloucestershire which in most cases has a detrimental impact on the character of the host building and the street scene context.

If a box dormer is considered the only viable option and justification to demonstrate this may be required, then to mitigate the most harmful aspects of such a design, set out below is a set of design principles that will need to be followed.

ALL BOX DORMERS SHOULD ADHERE TO ALL THE FOLLOWING DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

- Be aligned with and in proportion to the host building in terms of fenestration arrangements;
- Be sited 300mm below the main ridge;
- Be sited 300mm from the roof verges or sides;
- Be sited 500mm above the eaves
- Be set back from the principal elevation

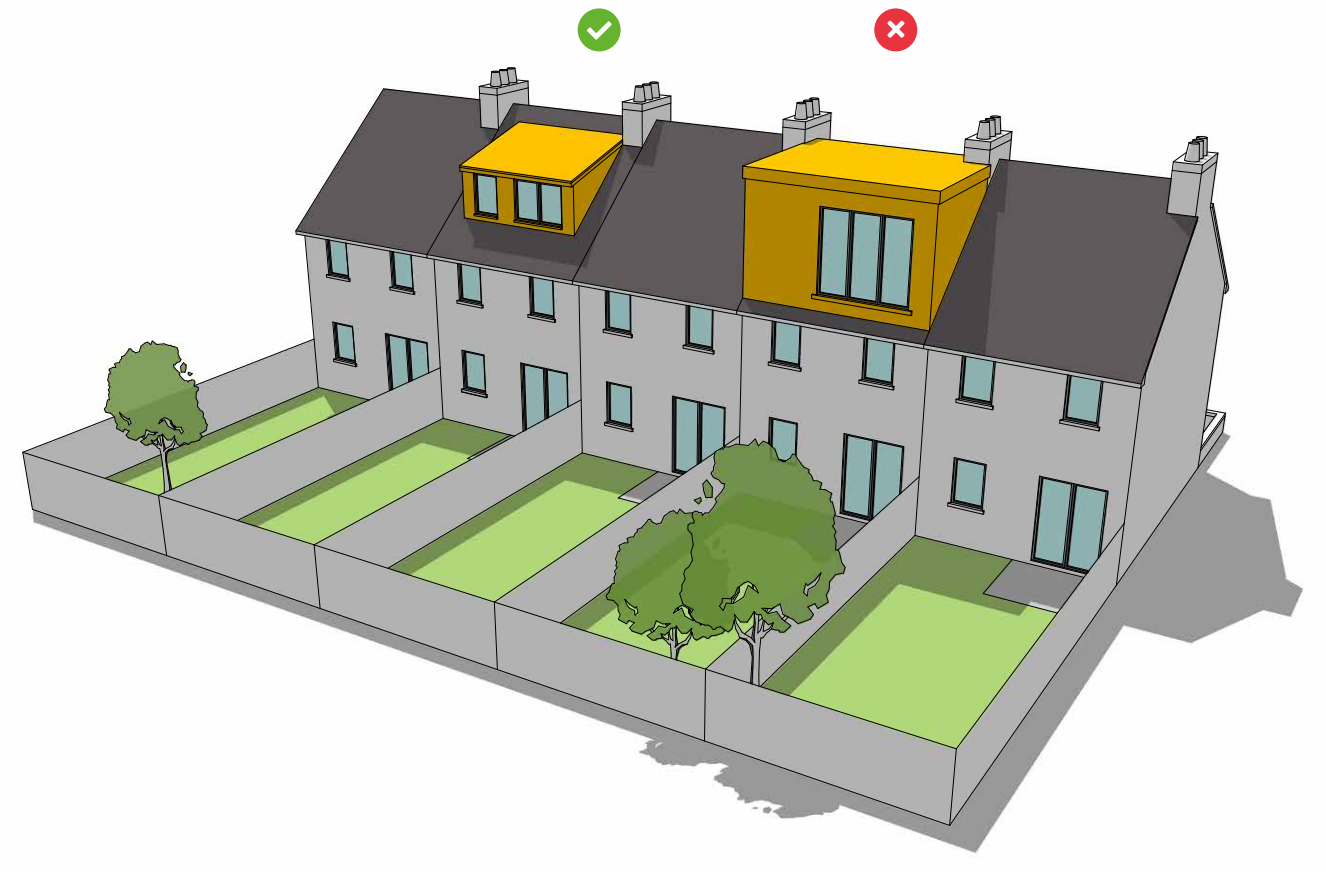

FIG.29 Key dimensions to follow to ensure any box dormer is limited in scale and resultant visual impact.

In addition to the key design principles noted above, where existing dormers are present on the adjoining properties the new box dormer should only be considered on the same roof plane. Box dormers on the side of a hipped roofed property in particular are rarely acceptable and they can result in a change in form that could cause significant harm to the character and rhythm of the street scene.

The design and proportions of any box dormer should correspond to the host building, i.e. position and scale of windows. They should also avoid conflict with existing gables or changes in roof form.

Adherence to the above design guidance will also ensure a dominant box dormer that appears like a second floor flat roofed extension would be avoided. While it may result in a smaller dormer than permissible under permitted development, its visual impact would be significantly improved as the front plane of the box dormer structure is pulled back from the principal elevation. Following the guidance on dimension may also allow for a catslide roof to be considered thereby removing the often visually harmful flat roofed form.

2.6 BALCONIES

Balconies and external platforms can provide useful and meaningful outside amenity space particularly in areas where garden sizes are limited or non-existent. The scale of the balcony is key in ensuring its use and design is compatible with the host dwelling and the character of the area.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES – BALCONIES OR EXTERNAL RAISED PLATFORMS:

- Balconies are only acceptable in areas where established character includes such features and would not disrupt the pattern or symmetry of the street scene;
- All balconies should satisfy the separation distances and amenity criteria for a two-storey extension.

Any balconies or raised platforms will also be assessed in terms of impact on the existing levels of residential amenity. Where overlooking to neighbouring properties including garden space, is considered to be unacceptably extended beyond acceptable levels, under policy PSP8, new balconies will resisted. To provide some guidance on how this issue will be assessed, the 45 degree rule and guidance on the separation distances will be used.

Fig.30 A good example of how to design and provide balconies that add to both the amenity levels of the occupants but also the character of the area.

PART 3: **RESIDENTIAL AMENITY**

3.1 WHAT IS RESIDENTIAL AMENITY?

Residential amenity is not defined in law. In planning terms, 'amenity' is often used to refer to the quality or character of an area and elements that contribute to the overall enjoyment of an area. Residential amenity considers elements that are particularly relevant to the living conditions of a dwelling.

Residential amenity has a significant and valuable impact on the way in which people use their homes. The health and well-being of residents is often directly related to the level of residential amenity occupants can enjoy. It is a duty of the planning system to support sustainable development . Sustainable development incorporates a social role which seeks to secure well designed, strong, vibrant and healthy communities .

When assessing how a development proposal may impact on the existing amenity of an area and living conditions of nearby occupiers, the following issues would be significant:

1. **Privacy**
   How would the development proposals affect privacy levels?
2. **Overbearing effects**
   Would the scale of development and its proximity to other buildings result in an oppressive environment?
3. **Natural light and outlook**
   Would the development provide existing or proposed properties with sufficient outlook and natural lighting levels thereby avoiding significant overshadowing and enclosure?
4. **Environmental effects**
   Would the development cause or be exposed to any other environmental effects?
5. **Other design guidance**
   How does the design of the proposal promote a good standard of amenity?

3.2 SAFEGUARDING PRIVACY

The best way of ensuring privacy for new and existing housing is to ensure that windows do not look onto private areas. 'Private areas' can be regarded as both rooms within a house and the garden area immediately to the rear of a house, as this part of the curtilage tends to make the biggest contribution to the enjoyment of the property.

Window-to-Window Distances
To ensure levels of privacy are protected, direct and perceived overlooking and inter-visibility between primary living accommodation should be resisted. This can be achieved through sufficient separation distances which can avoid any unacceptable loss of, or reduction in, levels of privacy.

Window-to-Window Distances
Where windows serving primary living accommodation in the rear of a dwelling face another dwelling, development that demonstrates that the following separation distances to ensure privacy levels are protected, will be considered to reflect the highest possible standards of design.

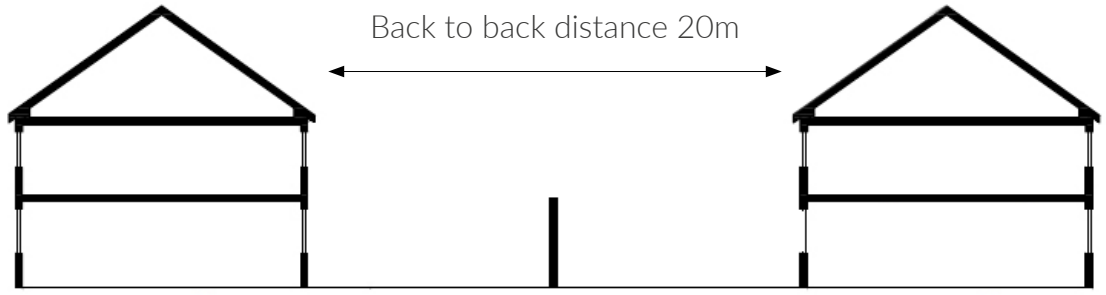

Fig.31 Two-storey dwellings: back-to-back distance of 20 metres

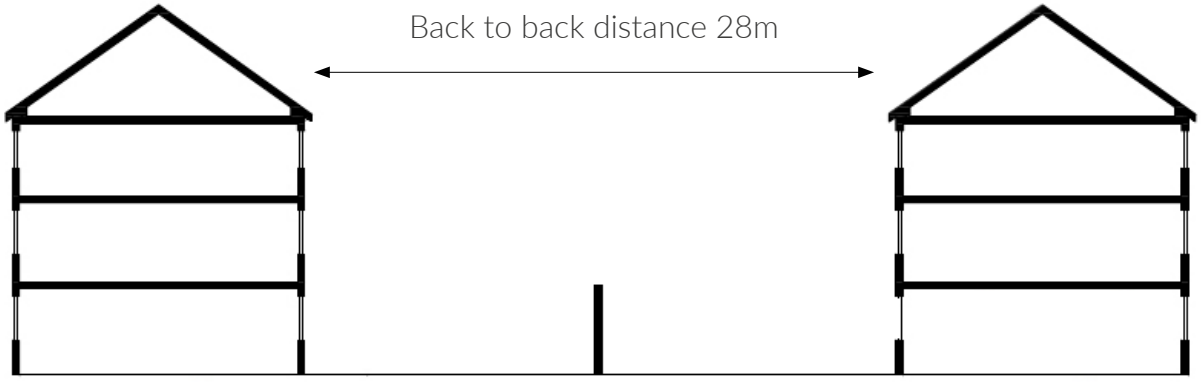

Fig.32 Two or more-storey dwellings: back-to-back distance of 28 metres

Whilst the window-to-window separation distances stated are sufficient to protect residential amenity, they should only be used as the starting point in any assessment. The characteristics of the site may allow some degree of variation from the window-to-window distances. For example -

- **Where there is a difference in ground level between buildings:**
  In these instances, the separation distance may need to be increased in order to mitigate the increase in overlooking caused by the elevation of one building in respect to the other.

- **Where houses face each other at an angle:**
  The more oblique the relationship between dwellings (typically 30^{o} or more), the less likely it is that there would be inter-visibility between rooms. In these instances, the separation distance may be reduced without a detrimental impact on privacy levels.

- **Where the impact on privacy levels can be satisfactorily mitigated:**
  For example, through the use of obscure glazing and restricted openings (for the avoidance of doubt, it would not be acceptable for principal rooms to only have obscure glazed windows).

- **Where due regard is given to the character and context of an area:**
  There are numerous areas in South Gloucestershire where development that fails to meet the separation distances may not result in harm to amenity. This is due to the existing relationship between different elements of the built form. For example, communities in 'inner-urban' areas are often typified by tight-knit, higher-density, housing where different residential units have a successful 'cheek-by-jowl' relationship. In such areas, it may be possible for applicants to demonstrate that shorter separation distances would be acceptable as there would be no harmful impact on amenity.

There are no minimum separation distances where dwellings front one another across the public realm, for example a street, as the land is usually already subject to overlooking. However, consideration will be given to the prevailing separation distances in the locality. Proposals that fail to respect the existing development pattern are unlikely to be considered to meet the highest possible standards of design.

Balconies

Although balconies can help improve the level of residential amenity offered to a dwelling, the provision of a balcony can have a significant impact on privacy levels. A balcony is defined as a platform with a rail, balustrade or parapet, projecting outside an upper storey of a building. This differs from a Juliet balcony; a Juliet balcony does not usually permit external access . When assessing amenity, Juliet balconies are considered more like a window rather than a traditional balcony that permits external access.

Where proposals include a projecting balcony, it is important that the balcony is sensitively designed. A projecting balcony can increase opportunities for overlooking due to its ability to allow external access. A balcony also has a greater perceived impact on privacy than a window. Where a projecting balcony would allow a direct sideways view over land immediately to the rear of another dwelling, the balcony may be resisted due to its impact on residential amenity.

In some instances, the relationship with neighbouring properties may enable any overlooking and subsequent loss of privacy to be overcome by the installation of side screens. Any proposed screen would need to be of sufficient height to mitigate the impact of the balcony on residential amenity and meet the highest possible standards of design. Low quality and poorly designed screens are unlikely to be considered acceptable.

Where balconies allow other views, the separation distances suggested for windows (above) should be applied from the rear most section of the balcony. The rear most projecting section of a balcony would be that which is furthest away from the rear wall of the dwelling. In practice, recessed or 'internal' balconies which form part of the shell of the building often have the least impact on residential amenity and may be considered an appropriate alternative.

Best Practice

In reality many amenity issues can be avoided by instigating a high quality approach to design. Where applicants struggle to finalise a design without properly and fully considering its impact on privacy, it is often an indication that the proposal is unsuited to the site and the development should be reconsidered.

Whilst some impacts on privacy are tangible and quantifiable, others are much more opaque and difficult to measure. The perceived loss of privacy, through the presence of windows and balconies (external or otherwise), can have an impact on residential amenity and development proposals should seek to minimise such impacts.

3.3 OVERBEARING EFFECTS

'Overbearing' is a term used to describe a dominating impact of development on its surroundings or on a nearby property. Whether a proposed development is considered to be overbearing will differ on a case-by-case basis, and the assessment is dependent on a number of factors.

Overbearing impacts can be caused by:

- the physical 'presence' of a building - its scale and mass
- an oppressive feeling as a result of the development
- an intrusive feeling as a result of the development.

Proposals that result in an overbearing impact on the residential amenity of nearby occupiers will not be considered to meet the highest possible standards of design and are therefore more likely to be resisted.

Best Practice
In considering planning applications and enforcement investigations, the relationship between the proposal and the surroundings will be considered. Well designed, high quality schemes are the best way to avoid issues of overbearing. Where applicants struggle to finalise a design without an overbearing impact, it is often an indication that the proposal is unsuitable.

The guidance contained in the following section on natural light and outlook is also particularly relevant to understanding and assessing an overbearing impact. When a development has a prejudicial impact on natural light and outlook it is highly likely that the development would also be considered overbearing. Therefore, advice in relation to natural light and outlook should also be considered in relation to overbearing effects.

Unacceptable levels of overshadowing caused by excessive depth or inappropriate siting of an extension will not be permitted.

Natural Light and Outlook
The design solutions to these two issues are often interlinked, so both are considered here. In terms of definitions, neither are defined in law. For the purposes of assessing the impacts of development on residential amenity 'outlook' is taken to mean what you look out on to, such as the prospect from a window. 'Natural light' refers to the amount of ambient light that enters a room from all directions during the course of a day.

Rooms of primary living accommodation should have sufficient natural light to allow the room to be comfortably used. Primary living accommodation should not have an enclosed or oppressive outlook. Areas of garden immediately to the rear of a house offer the highest amenity value. These areas should benefit from sufficient natural light to enable them to be comfortably used.

Natural Light

Natural light is important to residential amenity because it makes a home a pleasant and healthy place in which to live in. In the initial design stages, consideration should be given to the orientation of the proposal so that it can benefit from the most natural light. Natural light is also beneficial in reducing energy demand by providing passive heating and lighting. Development should aim to ensure that every house receives the maximum natural light throughout the year. When this is difficult to achieve, for example a single-aspect flat that faces north, all reasonable attempts should be made to increase natural light levels. Examples of possible methods include larger windows and introducing natural light internally.

Is there such a thing as a right to light?

The 'right to light' is related to planning considerations on natural light but it is not distinguished as a consideration in its own right. The right to light is an easement established under common law. It may be acquired by 'anyone who has had uninterrupted use of something over someone else's land for 20 years without consent, openly and without threat, and without interruption for more than a year' .

In general, easements are civil matters and do not come under planning law. The planning system will seek protection, by resisting development with overbearing impacts, but does not grant a right to light . More information regarding the right to light is published by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and can be found on their website, http://www.rics.org/uk/. If you have concerns regarding the right to light and the impact of development, you are advised to seek professional legal advice.

Outlook

As with natural light, outlook is important as a dwelling without an outlook is an undesirable place to live. The planning system has been established to work in the public interest and therefore it does not afford protection to a specific private view. However, it is reasonable for development to secure high quality and healthy living conditions for occupants by ensuring an acceptable outlook. Important public views that make a significant contribution to the character of an area may be a consideration under policy PSP1 and PSP2 (Landscape) but are unlikely to be a residential amenity consideration. Development which results in prejudicial harm to the outlook of a residential property will not be considered to reach the highest possible standards of design. As a result it is more likely such proposals will be resisted.

Best Practice

There are no definitive rules on how the impact of development on natural light and outlook should be considered but the guidance contained within this document is intended to provide some "best practice" tools to make an assessment. As with the other topics covered within this SPD, ultimately a high quality design often prevents such impacts from occurring. Nevertheless, when assessing planning applications and enforcement investigations, the following tools are available to assist in making a judgement.

(i) THE "25 DEGREE TEST"

In order to ensure that development benefits from adequate levels of natural light and outlook, the 25 degree test can be applied. To pass this test, no facing building should break a 25 degree angle from a horizontal point two metres above ground level when on a level surface. Changes in the ground level over a site would need to be factored in to the assessment separately.

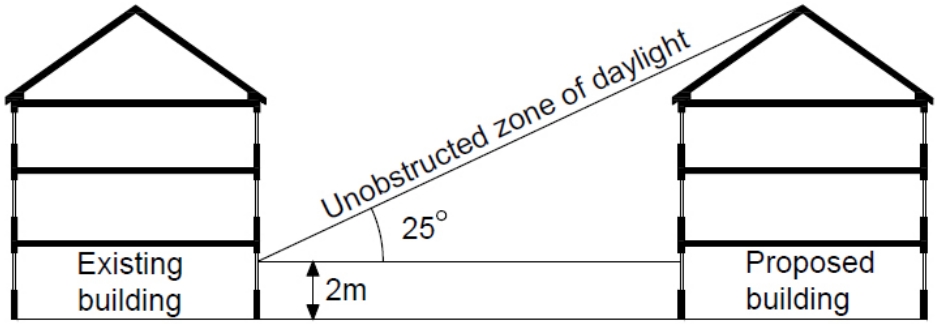

FIG.33 The 25 degree Test

Where an 'unobstructed zone' can be achieved within an angle of 25° above a horizontal line drawn two metres above ground level satisfactory levels of natural light and outlook are likely to be achievable.

(ii) THE "45 DEGREE" TEST

The 45 degree test looks at the horizontal rather than the vertical layout to ensure adequate levels of natural light and outlook. Under this test, no part of a building should breaks an angle of 45 degrees drawn from the centre of a window in a room of primary living accommodation.

"The 45 degree test" is fairly basic and does not take into account the height of the proposed development. A two-storey extension would have a more significant impact than a single storey extension. Any assessment will also need to take into account the impact of existing buildings and boundary treatments.

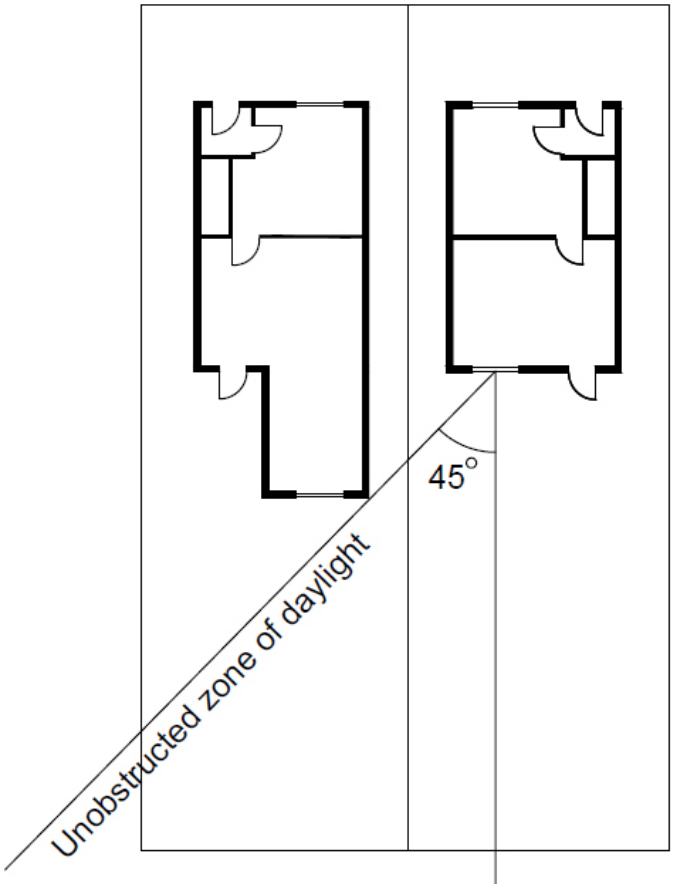

Fig.34 The 45 Degree Test

Where an 'unobstructed zone' can be achieved within an angle of 45^{0} drawn from the centre of the affected window satisfactory levels of natural light and outlook are likely to be achievable.

(iii) The "Window-to-Wall" Test

Whilst window-to-window distances are aimed at protecting privacy, the window-to-wall test protects natural light and outlook. Where a window to a primary room faces onto the blank elevation of another building, a separation distance of 12 metres should be maintained. Where a separation distance of 12 metres or over is achieved, it is unlikely that development would provide insufficient levels of natural light or outlook. Where a separation distance of this length cannot be achieved, the blank elevation is likely to become a dominant and overbearing feature to the detriment of amenity.

(iv) The "7 Metre Rule"

To help protect the privacy levels of neighbouring properties by ensuring existing levels of overlooking are not increased either materially or by perception, any two-storey rear extension with primary habitable rooms should be located no less than 7 metres from any facing garden boundary.

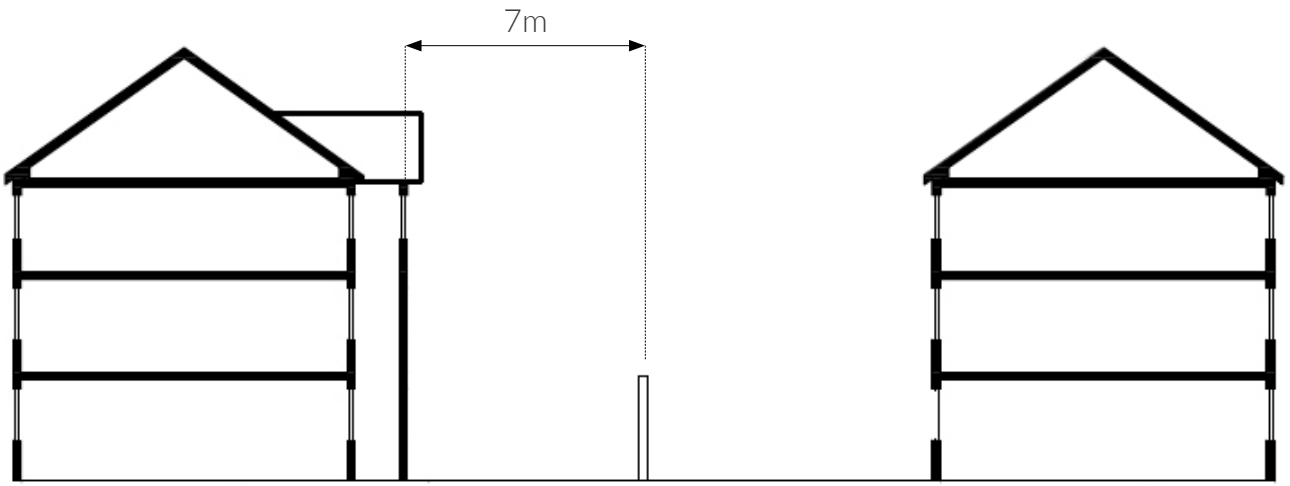

Fig.35 Any first floor proposed rear facing windows must be located no less than 7 metres from any facing boundary gardens.

3.4 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

All development proposals should consider the effect on residential amenity of noise, air quality, odour, and light. The extent to which any of the above factors may be harmful is dependent on the character of the area and the circumstances of the case.

Particular care to the above factors should be given when development proposes primary living accommodation on the ground floor of a building in close proximity to a busy road. In such instances adequate mitigation of any impact would be expected or the development would not be considered to meet the highest possible standards of design and is likely to be resisted.

Considerations which apply to air quality will, in many cases, apply equally to noise. Where there are high levels of pollution from traffic, there will also tend to be high ambient noise levels. Development should be designed to alleviate the impacts of this. Inevitably, mitigation measures that alleviate one will, to a large extent, benefit the other.

High quality design can be used to help provide protection to amenity from environmental effects. When there is concern that residents (both existing and future) would suffer from a harmful environmental impact, the following design solutions should be considered:

- set back upper floors and/or the introduction of recessed balconies
- provide internal courtyards onto which primary living accommodation may face
- plan parking areas on the ground floor and at the front of the building
- include areas of secure and private space to provide amenity space to residents.

Excessive or inappropriately placed artificial light can also have an adverse effect on people and wildlife whilst also wasting energy. In designing any larger scale development, the proposed and existing lighting levels should be considered so the impact on the existing and proposed occupiers can be assessed and managed.

3.5 OTHER DESIGN GUIDANCE

Site Characteristics and Requirements

This section is included to highlight aspects of development design which have a significant interrelationship with residential amenity. To ensure acceptable living conditions, consideration should be given to the impact of the following aspects of development on residential amenity:

- position, ease of accessibility, and safety of parking spaces (detailed guidance on parking provision is published in the Council's Residential Parking Standard SPD, December 2013) with PSP16 also is in the process of being updated;
- electric vehicle charging points
- position, ease of accessibility, and capacity of waste and recycling storage (detailed guidance on this subject is published in the Council's Waste Collection: Guidance for New Developments SPD, January 2017)
- provision and position of outbuildings, i.e. garden shed.

Internal Layout

The size, shape and layout of a property has a direct effect on how comfortable it is to live in. Internal layout is important as it dictates how the space in a dwelling is used and makes rooms attractive and usable. Layouts which allow as much interconnection between rooms of primary living accommodation as possible often result in higher levels of use of each room, and subsequently better and healthier living conditions for the occupants.

The Government has produced the Nationally Described Space Standard. Therefore, weight may be attributed to the internal layout as part of wider residential amenity considerations. Development that falls below the Nationally Described Space Standard is unlikely to be considered to meet the highest possible standards of design and may be resisted.

Outdoor Amenity Space

The availability, accessibility, utility and size of outdoor amenity space or gardens has an impact on the living conditions of a property. Policy PSP43 sets a minimum private amenity space standard for all new residential units, including the sub-division of existing residential units. The policy requires outdoor amenity space to:

- take into account context and character
- be private, useable, functional and safe
- be easily accessible from primary living accommodation
- be orientated to maximise sunlight, and
- be of a sufficient size and shape to meet the needs of the occupants.

In order to meet the requirements of PSP44, outdoor amenity space should not blindly meet the minimum size without due consideration of the design and layout. For example, a garden which meets the minimum size standard but which is on steeply sloping land is unlikely to be useable. Therefore, both the size and quality of the proposed outdoor amenity space would be a consideration.

High quality and well-designed outdoor amenity space is fundamental to achieving an acceptable standard of development which offers a good standard of amenity to future occupiers.

3.6 USE OF PLANNING CONDITIONS

A planning condition may be attached to a planning permission. A condition is usually used to require applicants to submit further information for assessment or to limit, control or direct the manner in which development can be carried out .

Conditions may be used to secure mitigation measures that have been proposed to reduce the impact of development on residential amenity. Examples may include conditions requiring the installation of privacy screens, fences, or which require the use of obscure glazing. Conditions can also be used to place restrictions on window openings, or indeed prevent new windows from being installed.

When a condition is imposed it is not an absolute blanket restricting all future development. In practice, it means a planning application would be required for any development to which the condition relates. In the course of the subsequent planning application, the impact of the proposal on residential amenity will be considered. The fact that something may be contrary to a condition is not sufficient reason to resist that development. The development would only be resisted where it would cause demonstrable harm to residential amenity.

All planning conditions must meet the tests of a condition, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework . These tests require planning conditions to be: necessary; relevant to planning and to the development to be permitted; enforceable; precise; and, reasonable in all other respects. If a condition fails to meet these tests, the Council cannot apply it. This may result in the proposal being considered unacceptable as the impact on residential amenity cannot be satisfactorily mitigated.

3.7 THE OVERALL 'PLANNING BALANCE'

Determining planning applications and considering enforcement investigations is a process of balancing and mitigating the impacts of development. In order to do this, Planning Officers apply varying degrees of weight to different aspects of the development depending on the level of harm. Therefore, it should not be assumed that a proposal which fails to meet all, some, or even any of the above tests would be refused. An application would only be refused when, on balance and in the public interest, the cumulative impact of the development outweighs the benefits.

PART 4: IMPROVING ENERGY PERFORMANCE AND LIVEABILITY WHILE REDUCING CO_2 EMISSIONS

When undertaking works to extend a home it is an opportune time to consider the energy efficiency, thermal comfort, air quality and the energy requirements of both the extension and the host dwelling. While internal works to an existing dwelling do not require planning permission, the external appearance of the extension and potentially the host dwelling will be influenced by an energy efficient design in terms of orientation, materials, fenestration or the addition of renewable energy technologies such as photovoltaic or solar thermal panels and heat pumps.

The energy efficiency of a home is determined by a range of factors including how the space within it is used, insulation, materials, technologies and workmanship.

Other areas for consideration include:

- Air tightness
- Ventilation, including opportunities for heat recovery
- Insulation including floors, walls, ceilings, roofs, windows and doors
- Embodied energy in the construction materials
- Opportunities to install Photovoltaic Panels to generate electricity
- Battery storage
- Solar thermal for hot water and the potential for space heating support.
- Enhancing passive solar gain through appropriate glazing while avoiding the potential for overheating
- Low Carbon Heating in the form of air source and ground source heat pumps
- Lighting.

Part L of the Building Regulations require a minimum standard of energy efficiency in extensions although currently they do not require the host dwelling to be improved as part of the work. The Council, however, strongly encourages homeowners to strive to achieve standards beyond these minimum levels and apply them to both the existing home and the extension, so that the significant benefits of reducing energy consumptions are maximised along with increasing the comfort of the extended home through better temperature control and air quality.

Homes within South Gloucestershire generate approximately one third of Districts CO_2 emissions due to, in part, their inefficiency. Taking action to upgrade the performance of existing homes as part of extension works is a cost-efficient way to reduce emissions and lock them into the fabric and future value of the building.

PART 5: GLOSSARY

Amenity space: area of public open space available for the amenity and enjoyment of the public and/ or local residents.

Conservation areas: an area designated as being of special architectural or historic interest, where the preservation and enhancement of its character and appearance is a priority.

Context: a building or site context usually refers to the surrounding physical environment, but can also refer to the social, economic and political nature of a place.

Eaves: the lowest, overhanging part of a sloping roof.

Enclosure: definition or bounding of a space by physical features such as buildings, trees, or fences.

Fenestration: the pattern formed by windows in a building façade.

Gable end: the triangular part of an end wall of a building with a sloping roof.

Green belt: a ring of countryside surrounding an urban area, designed to prevent urban sprawl. National and local policies are in place to protect the Green Belt.

Hipped roof: a roof which has four slopes instead of the two slopes of the ordinary gable roof – main roof has the two slopes but with two further slopes at either end on an axis to the main roof which constitutes the hips.

Listed building: a building that has been placed on the Statutory listed of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. A limited building may not be demolished, extended, or altered without listed building consent being granted.

Locally listed: a building deemed by South Gloucestershire Council to be of local special architectural or historic interest.

Overbearing: a term used to describe the impact of a development or building on its surroundings, particular a neighbouring property, in terms of scale, massing, and general dominating effect.

Over-development: an amount of development that it excessive in terms of demands on infrastructure and services, or impact on local amenity and character.

Primary habitable rooms: the main living areas in a home including bathrooms and sitting rooms.

Proportions: a system of relationships of parts to each other and to the whole, i.e. the ration of windows to solid masonry – i.e the "solid-to-void ratio".

Public realm: the areas of a settlement, dedicated to the general use of the public, such as streets, squares and parks.

Ridge: the apex of a pitched roof where the two slopes meet, especially the horizontal edge thus formed.

Setting: the area surrounding a site.

Soldier course: a course of bricks laid vertically, commonly seen at lintel level (above doors and windows), and at the top of the walls as protection from weathering.

Streetscape: the overall impression given by the design and arrangement of buildings, landscaping and open space.

Subservience/ subordinate design: a design that allows the original building to remain dominant in terms of massing, height and position.

Topography: the natural and man-made physical features of an area that make up the landscape. Building heights, land slopes, and levels are key aspects of a setting that make up its character.

Vernacular: the traditional architecture of an area evolved over time, based on local needs and local construction materials.

CONTACT DETAILS

Development Management Team
Department for Environment and Community Services
PO Box 1954
Bristol

planningapplications@southglos.gov.uk

01454 868004

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