

# A bit on the side

**Ben Field** offers 10 ways you can create space and add value — without having to apply for planning permission

**A**dding an extension or a garage will improve your home and add thousands to its market value. So what's stopping you? The most common answer is planning permission, or the lack of it.

Many people just can't be bothered to put their lives on hold for months while their plans are examined by the parish council, planners and, possibly, an appeal panel. The good news is you don't always need planning permission. In

development can be done without it. You should discuss your ideas with the local planning authority first, however. If you live in a listed building, separate listed-building consent is often required, for work inside and out.

We have put together a top 10 of the best home improvements that you can put into effect without having to wait on the planners.

**1 Walls come tumbling down:** Making two rooms into one, or adding stud or blockwork walls, can create space that suits your needs perfectly. Planning permission isn't needed as long as you aren't changing the way the house is used (dividing it into separate dwellings or for business use, for example). Always consult an architect or structural engineer before you start knocking down any load-bearing walls. *Value added to house: up to 10%*

**2 Let in the light:** Natural light is highly desirable in any home, and a great selling point, too. "Buyers love natural light," says Paul Briggs, of the eponymous estate agency in Market Deeping, Lincolnshire. "The more there is, the better." Tired double-glazed units and windows with thick glazing bars restrict light and can be replaced with a more light-friendly option

without planning permission. Extra doors and windows can also sometimes be added, too. *Value added to house: up to 10%*

**3 A roof over the car:** Garages aren't just a safe place to park, they are also an ideal haven for all the stuff you don't want in the house but don't want to throw away. You don't need planning permission if the garage is to be built 5m or more away from the house (if closer, see single-storey

must not be nearer to the road than the original house, be more than 4m high (pitched roof) or 3m high if it has a flat roof. The combined ground area of the garage and other buildings within the property boundary (apart from the house) must not cover more than half the total area. *Value added to house: 10%-20%*

If you don't want to build a garage, off-road parking is always welcome and doesn't need planning consent as long as it doesn't involve the creation of an access to a classified road, is within the property's boundary and won't be used by commercial vehicles. If you don't have a dropped kerb already, this may be subject to planning consent. Talk to the planning authority, which will also be able to advise on an approved (and properly insured) contractor to do the work. *Value added to house: up to £10,000 per space*

**4 Moving up:** A loft conversion could create a couple of extra bedrooms, a home office or a massive playroom for the children. As long as the actual volume of the house isn't increased, and its cubic content is not exceeded by more than 50m<sup>3</sup> in the case of a terraced house and 70m<sup>3</sup> in any other type of house, you don't need approval for this type of work. But before you go ahead, think about the impact it will have on your home.

"It's important that a loft conversion doesn't make a home unbalanced," says Briggs. "Adding two bedrooms upstairs is great, but is there enough space downstairs to complement them? A proper staircase to the conversion is also important among buyers." *Value added to house: 6%-15% per bedroom*

Loft conversions in smaller roof spaces can be made much more useful by adding a dormer window to increase headroom and light, though there are rules governing the addition of dormers. *Value added to house: 6%-15% per bedroom*

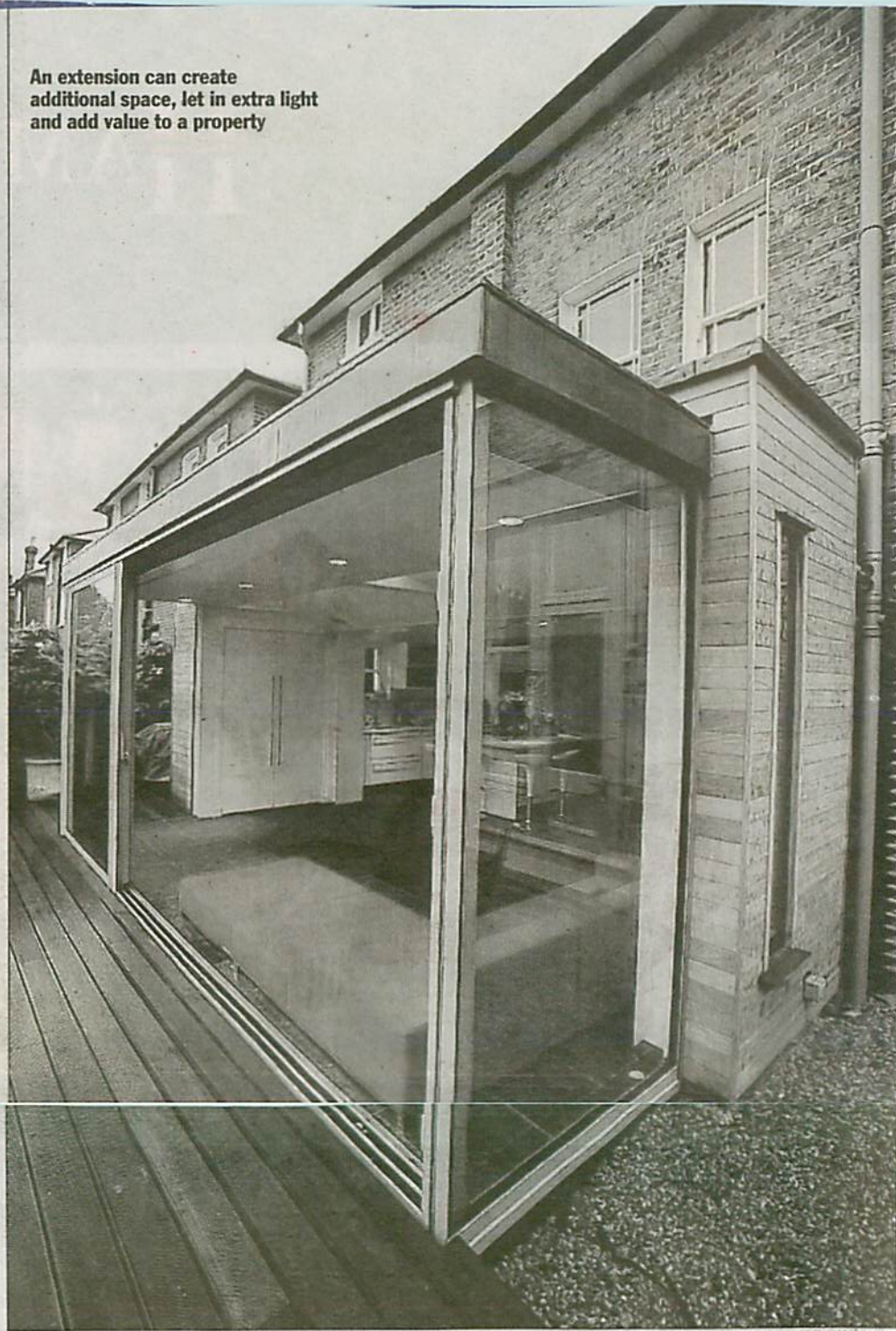
**5 Single-storey extension:** Increasing the size of a downstairs room such as the kitchen will increase space and add value, and you may not need planning permission to do it. The extension must not be more than 4m high and should not be within 2m of the boundary of the house. It must not exceed 50m<sup>3</sup> in the case of a terraced house and 70m<sup>3</sup> for any other house.

"Volume is used extensively in describing the amount that can be built without planning permission," says planning consultant Ken Dijksman. "Remember that all such measurements are based on external dimensions and include the roof, too."

In addition, an extension can't be built nearer to a road than the existing house or, with other outbuildings, cover more than 50% of the garden. *Value added to house: at least 10%*

**6 A splashing time:** Buyers decide what a house is worth, and luxury additions such as swimming pools can polarise opinions; however, a well-designed pool in the right setting is often seen as a bonus. The pool, when combined with any existing outbuilding or extensions, must not cover more than half the garden. *Value added to house: up to 5%*

An extension can create additional space, let in extra light and add value to a property



Mark Writtle

**7 People in glass houses:** Adding a well-constructed conservatory will add value to a property. However, a conservatory past its best will work against you and detract from the value of the house. You can build a good-sized conservatory without planning permission if it falls within the parameters set up for an extension (see point 5, above). *Value added to house: up to 10%*

**8 The home office:** Using a spare bedroom or even a dedicated garden building as an office is unlikely to be a planning issue. Dijksman says: "The basic principle for home-working is that planning permission is not usually needed if the character and use of the building remains essentially residential." *Value added to house: a well-designed garden building is an attractive extra and could add up to 2.5%*

**9 Granny in the garden:** If you have existing outbuildings, they can be used as extra accommodation without applying for planning permission. This situation is only acceptable if the resident of the "annexe" spends much of the time in the main house and the space is not used as a separate dwelling. You should check with your local planning authority before decking out any outbuilding for habitation. *Value added to house: up to 10%*

**10 Exterior makeovers:** Painting and general maintenance of the outside of your home doesn't require planning permission; cladding can be problematic if it extends in front of the house. *Value added to house: up to 5%*

**Further information**  
English Heritage, 0870 333 1181, www.english-heritage.org.uk, and Period Property

UK, www.periodproperty.co.uk both offer helpful advice.

**Building regulations**  
Many of the projects mentioned above will require building regulations approval before work begins and are subject to volume and height restrictions. Building regulations ensure that the correct materials and processes are used and are really there to protect you from constructing something dangerous or unsuitable. Talk through your proposal with the local building control officer long before you start. Visit www.planningportal.gov.uk for more information; you can also download a free 35-page guide, Planning: A Guide for Householders, from www.communities.gov.uk

**Recommended reading**  
The Planning Game by Ken Dijksman (Ovolo £15.95)  
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