

Why opt for an extension rather than moving into a bigger house?

Increasing numbers of home-owners are choosing to 'stay put' and undertake home improvements rather than moving house. With exorbitant stamp duty fees and property prices continuing to rise, homeowners are finding more and more that they can no longer buy their way to more space.

This is underlined by the fact that the Deputy Prime Minister has already reported record number of planning application submissions for home improvements. Planning authorities in England have received 159,000 applications in the last quarter of 2004 alone. Many more are believed to be undertaking major improvements that don't require planning consents.

With the introduction and possible saturation of home design shows the newly informed breed of homeowners are not only looking at how to maximise their budget, but also demand better design. What many are looking for are affordable solutions when it comes to advice on planning/building, design inspiration, drawings, builders etc.

architectyourhome has answered the call for more flexible, accessible and affordable design advice and has adapted the traditional architectural process to ensure homeowners of varying budgets, requirements and style can access a professional home design expert without daunting processes and all inclusive fee structures.

Hugo, Managing Director of architectyourhome, explains that 'for a fixed fee homeowners can now walk away after an initial half day visit with an outline proposal for their renovation, design options, sketch drawings, advice on planning/building regulations and likely costs for their renovation or extension going forward'

The chances are architectyourhome (Leeds) has completed a project in your street as the initial visit approach allows homeowners an easy path to getting started and the transfer of knowledge to then help you either go it alone DIY style, get some assistance along the way or have your project managed in its entirety.



How can we ensure that new extensions fit with the style of older homes?

One key aspect to consider with extensions is how to stay in keeping with the existing style of your property. An unsightly or highly contrasting extension will devalue your home.

New extensions need not feel or look out of place with the rest of your home. An architect's expertise rests in finding design solutions to ensure your renovation is in keeping with the rest of your home both in terms of flow, lighting and design.

Your architect will be focusing on the following to ensure your design does not stick out like a sore thumb

- Windows and doors
- Roofs
- Walls, bricks and plaster
- Symmetry and shape
- Finishing details.

Try to match key features such as the roof with those of the existing structure. Use similar materials and try to ensure doors and windows line up with existing fixtures. Avoid flat roofs if you can.

Be confident that what you've got in mind will blend in with neighbouring properties. During the planning process, your neighbours will have the opportunity to express their views but it's better to get them involved early on to iron out any

mis-givings and objections. An extension should also be decorated in keeping with the rest of the house.

What should we consider before opting for an extension?

Before deciding to extend your property there are a number of factors you need to consider.

Whether you really need the extra space by extending or whether you could resolve your space issues within your home by rearranging the space or even through clever storage solutions. architectyourhome customers are often amazed how some clever rearrangement of the spaces within a house can transform the way they use their home.

Consider the balance of your house. The balance of a property is very important, creating too big a ground floor or adding too many bedrooms can result in a house which appears awkward and uncomfortable.

What will the effect be on your garden or your neighbours? Think about how the extension will fit with the look of your house, both from the road and the garden. Showing your neighbours your proposals from an early stage can help to keep them 'onside' and help prevent objections later on.

Will you need planning permission or can your work be done under permitted development? This normally depends on the size of the house, whether it has had any previous extensions, how big they were, whether your property is listed or in a conservation area and the size of

the proposed extension. There are lots of quite complex criteria and if you know how to play them to your best advantage you could be amazed by what can be achieved.

Will the works have an impact to you house under the Building Regulations? The building regulations cover any new building work so an extension will need to comply. In most domestic situations the work can be done under a 'building notice' rather than full plans but there are "pro's" and con's" to this decision.

Bring in the experts. architectyourhome can help and advise you through the process of planning your extension or indeed help you to make an informed decision on whether an extension is possible or even if there is a better solution to finding that extra space. The great thing is that you can use them as much or as little as you feel is appropriate.

How much does the average extension cost?

This is such a difficult question to answer as this really does vary enormously depending on a whole range of factors such as the size of the extension, fittings, contractor etc. One thing to keep in mind is that your extension is only as good as the design and charging in without everything thought through in advance is probably the most expensive thing that you can do!

Often the first step is to gain an understanding of what design options are available, the likely costs and pitfalls, an idea on timeline and a high level understanding of what is required by way of planning and building regulations. The

decisions that are made upfront obviously impact the whole process and will form the framework of how you approach your building works and your budget.

There is a very helpful section within the architectyourhome website that describes the factors and shows cost estimator diagrams to help you work out a guideline as to what your project might cost. To find this, visit www.architect-yourhome.com and then go to the section called 'how much will it cost?'

Regarding the costs of using an architect (traditionally quite an expensive undertaking for home-owner projects) architectyourhome has developed a system that allows the customer to choose specific items from a service menu on a 'pay-as-you-go' basis. This system enables home-owners to use quality architects in a cost effective and affordable way. Customers get to choose to spend their money on the services they feel will benefit them the most giving them more control over their finances and a more cost effective way to use an architect.