

Ben Tottle called in help when he and his girlfriend could not decide how best to extend and improve their two bedroom house in Reddish.

Typical of thousands of Victorian terraces in the region it has an entrance hall and two reception rooms with a small kitchen at the back and two bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor and the couple have simply outgrown the accommodation it currently offers.

Ben explained: "It was great for my girlfriend, a little starter home with a manageable mortgage, but after I moved in, it quickly became apparent that it just isn't big enough for the both of us and the copious amounts of stuff we've both gathered over 30-odd years.

"We have not planned to move for a couple of years and with the current state of the market decide to look at the options we have to improve. I work from home, but there was no room for my desk in the bedroom or the spare room, so what was my girlfriend's dining room for entertaining has been transformed into a makeshift office for me. I'm also quite big on cooking, so would love more space. And with the high ceilings, large rooms, a cellar, loft and bags of garden space, we knew there must be something we could do. We just weren't sure how to do it"

They called in Architect Your Home, one of several companies offering a step-by-step design package for homeowners wary of commissioning an independent architect. From an initial visit to overseeing construction, each step has a separate fee, so you control costs.

Ben signed up for the minimum four hour consultation at £550 and covers one section of the house. For £850, you get seven hours of expert advice which could encompass a total redesign.

Several architects in the north west have signed up for the scheme (they pay a fee to join but in return know they will get paid right from an initial visit) including Justin O'Brien whose practice is based in Alderley Edge.

Ben said, "He put us at our ease and asked to explain our lifestyle and what we were after.

Fairly quickly he put us straight on the kitchen explaining that it wasn't small just badly organised with doors where there should be storage space. He also put us straight on our rather undefined idea of a conservatory on the back of the kitchen, explaining it would be freezing and next to useless in our north facing back garden – a cheaper option than a full extension, but clearly a false economy."

By the end of the visit Ben had scale drawings of how the space could be re-arranged with the middle room (currently used for dining/ work becoming the main living space. The side window would be knocked through into a L shaped extension which would widen the kitchen and open it on to a new-build dining room with folding glass doors looking out over the garden with decking for outside eating space.

Ben said, "he had some very clever ideas and the solution is simple and not too aggressive a change, just what we had been searching for. He also suggested boarding out the loft as a less expensive fix for our lack of storage space."

To take these initial thoughts and turn them into detailed plans, completed with building regulations and into planning application would cost another £1445, according the AYH fee scale.

An estimate from Justin, based on a price per square foot put the build at £25,000 to include new wiring and plumbing and a new kitchen.

Ben said "we loved the plans and there is no doubt it would make the house a much better place for us to

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live, but we just do not know if we would get that back when we eventually come to sell. We are still deliberating what to do and comparing the price of a bigger house in another area with the cost of doing this work.”

You can see examples of Architect Your home projects and fees at [www.architect-yourhome.com](http://www.architect-yourhome.com)