

When it comes to extending your property, investigating your options could save you thousands, says Jayne Atherton.

Can't face the stress of a house move? Then adding space with an extension could be easier and cheaper than buying a bigger home.

Get it wrong though, and you could actually reduce the resale value of your property, because there's nothing like a poorly constructed or ugly extension to put off buyers. A survey last year revealed that homeowners had spent £154 billion on renovations to their properties that, in fact, had reduced their values due to shoddy work.

Homeowners who want to extend have the choice of trusting a building firm to come up with a plan or investing in an architect. Bringing in an architect is likely to cost more than £1,000, including surveys, investigations into development rights and site meetings but they will also be able to tailor the extension to your needs and make it compatible with the remainder of the house.

A builder, however, will probably provide a more formulaic solution, although, in fact, this might be all you need. Homeowners need to decide what they want from their extension before splashing out on extensions.

According to research by architecture company Architectyourhome.com, four out of ten who are considering extensions want to do it in order to create more space in their homes, while more than one-third want to improve the layout of their properties.

Kitchens proved to be the most popular room to renovate, with 34 per cent of respondents considering improving this area, while 21 per cent said they wanted a larger bathroom and 15 per cent a bigger bedroom.

Jude Tugman, an architect and founder of architectyourhome, said 'Most builders can construct an extension to a plan they have worked out themselves but they don't pretend to be architects, who will have thought through the design to ensure the renovation will create the right kind of space so that it flows seamlessly into the existing building.'

'Something as simple as the height of a lintel beam, for example, can make all the difference in whether the extension ends up looking like a bolt-on or a genuine part of the living space.'

Three typical extensions: The Pros and Cons

Renovation: Loft conversion

Suitable for: Any property that has a loft space with at least 2m of head space at the highest point. Especially good for Victorian houses, which tend to have lots of room beneath the roof.

Cost: £40,000 to £70,000

Job Duration: Four to six months

Inconvenience factor on a scale of one to five (with five being the highest): Two. There will be some minimal disruption at the end of the project as builders link the new loft room with stairs to the rest of the house. Otherwise, direct access to the work site can usually be made from outside scaffolding.

What the experts say: Buy the right products from your needs. Dedicated loft conversion companies or building firms can offer lower prices but, although you'd get an extra room, the design may not flow into the rest of the house quite as well as if you had spent more money.

Be warned: Choosing a cheaper linking staircase, for example, can leave your loft room feeling more like an extension than a natural part of the house.



Renovation: Double-storey extension

Suitable for: Large houses that need more space but won't be swamped by such a big extension.

Cost: £50,000 to £100,000

Job duration: Six to seven months

Inconvenience factor on a scale of one to five (with five being the highest): Four or even five. A double-storey

extension often involves major remodelling of the house involving utilities being switched off, walls knocked down and dust and plaster everywhere. Moving out for a while will ease your stress and will give the builders free rein to make as much mess as they need to.

What the experts say: A double-storey extension can transform a house by extending bedrooms, bathrooms and linking smaller rooms to create a spacious living area. On the side of a house, they can turn a garage into a living space with an extended room over the top.

Be warned: Getting planning permission can involve a lot of issues around access and right to light for neighbours.



Renovation: Side extension, sometimes called a side-return.

Suitable for: Houses which have a side access pathway which is underused or gloomy and unwelcoming.

Cost: £40,000 to £50,000

Job duration: Three to four months

Inconvenience factor on a scale of one to five (with five being the highest): Three. Builders will probably need access to the room which is being linked to the side extension for a large part of the project time.

What the experts say: Side extensions are the most popular type of building renovation. Even a small extension can open up a kitchen or a family room. Glass roofs can draw skylight indoors so you don't have to rely on windows that probably face the walls of your neighbour's home or your boundary fences in a side passageway.

Be warned: Drainage can be a problem if the extension covers a manhole of a main drain. A professional building company will probably be able to solve it.

