

County Durham Plan

Residential Amenity Standards Supplementary Planning Document

2020 (Adopted Version)



Altogether better



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Background

1.1 This document provides guidance on how best to design extensions and undertake other domestic developments including decking, walls and balconies. It also includes guidance on the space/amenity standards that would normally be expected where new dwellings are proposed.

1.2 The SPD promotes high quality design which is sensitive and in keeping with the area in which it is located. The guidance provided in this document will be given significant weight when making decisions on householder planning applications and proposals involving new residential development.

1.3 This document is linked to the Sustainable Design Policy (30) of the County Durham Plan. The SPD will form part of the County Plan when it is adopted. In advance of the finalisation of the County Durham Plan existing policies in former district local plans provide the policy background (albeit the SPD updates any detailed requirements) together with national planning objectives. The SPD should be read alongside other key design guidance, for example the National Design Guide, Manual for Streets and Secured by Design.

Stages of SPD preparation

1.4 This SPD has been prepared in accordance with planning regulations ⁽ⁱ⁾, which require documents to be progressed through two rounds of consultation. The first of these consultations took place between 25 January to 8 March 2019, while a second draft was consulted upon from 5 July to 16 August 2019.

1.5 For both rounds of consultation copies of the SPD were made available at all libraries and customer access points throughout the County, as well as at main council buildings. The SPD was also published on the council's website. A separate Consultation Statement has been prepared setting out the comments and changes made to the document. The SPD was adopted 24 January 2020.

i Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

Purpose of this document

1.6 This SPD sets down guidance for anyone intending to undertake works within the confines of their residential property and covers the following areas:

- Rear extensions
- Front extensions
- Side extensions
- Roof alterations
- Garages
- Porches
- Decking and balconies
- Materials

1.7 It also provides guidance on privacy and amenity standards for new residential development and includes guidance on garden space/plot sizes.

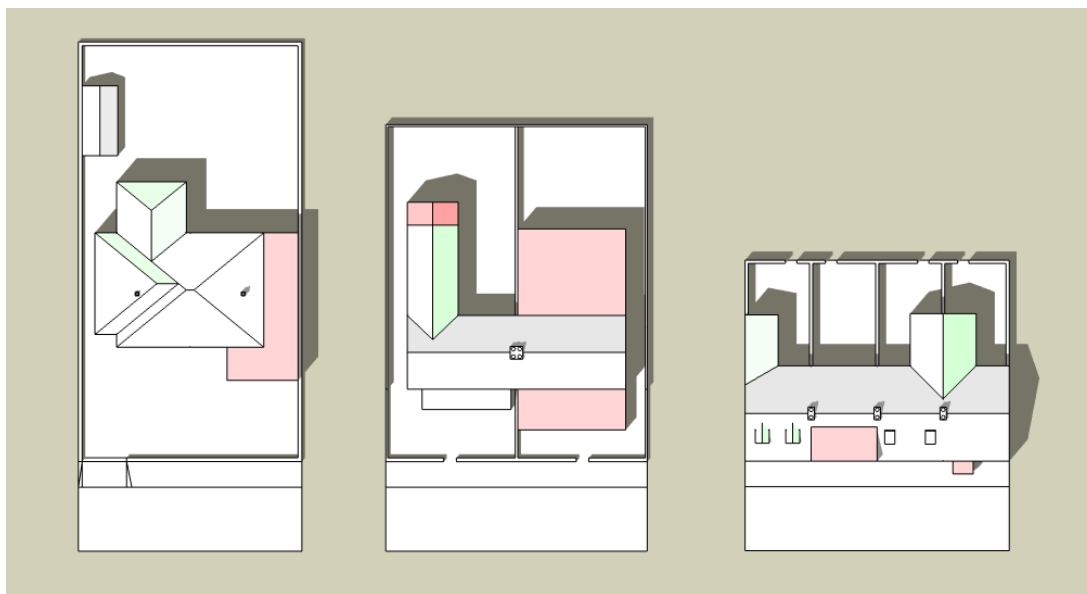
General Design Principles

2.1 The following design principles will help ensure a successful outcome:

- When considering the design of house extensions it is important to ensure that the design is not only sympathetic to, and in keeping with, the host property, but also the character and appearance of its surroundings.
- House extensions should be subordinate to the host dwelling.
- Roof design is an important feature of any extension and should normally match that of the existing dwelling. Mixing gable and hipped roofs should be avoided as they create unbalanced, confused designs which detract from the appearance of the property and the surrounding area.
- Additional windows should be of an appropriate size, shape, proportion, style and colour that respect the overall design of both the extension and its host dwelling.
- It is important that the amenity of adjacent properties are protected in relation to the over-dominance, loss of privacy and loss of daylight, of proposed extensions.
- Changes in levels between dwellings can increase or decrease the effect that an extension may have upon an adjacent property. Differences in site levels will be taken into account in all cases when making a decision.

2.2 The following guidelines are supportive of imaginative architecture and innovative design. They will be applied taking into account the characteristics of the surrounding street scene and any designated or non-designated heritage assets such as Conservation areas and Listed Buildings.

Please note that the drawings used are for illustrative purposes only. They identify good (green) and bad (red) examples of householder developments, however they are not to scale and they do not imply that planning permission will be granted as there may be exceptions depending upon the local context (for example in relation to dormer windows).

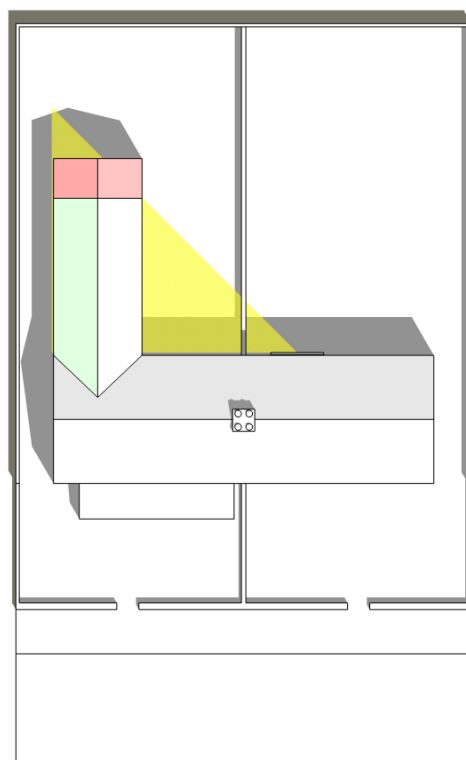


Rear Extensions

2.3 Rear extensions are usually the simplest and most acceptable way of extending the size and number of rooms in your home. Although rear extensions are rarely visible from the street, they are usually highly visible from neighbouring properties. Sunlight and daylight are important factors in securing a good quality living environment. To minimise the potential for overshadowing to neighbouring properties and to help determine whether a more detailed daylight and sunlight assessment is needed the Council operate what is known as a '45 degree code'.

2.4 The code is applied by drawing an imaginary line at 45-degrees from the mid-point of the nearest window to a habitable⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ room on any adjoining owner's property. If this line cuts through any part of the development proposed then this is a clear indication the extension is potentially too large and should be reduced in scale. The extent of the impact will however depend upon a number of factors including the orientation of the property, existing features such as boundary walls, outbuildings and other solid structures, ground levels and the type of window impacted upon (i.e. whether it is a primary or secondary window).

ⁱⁱ Any room used or intended to be used for sleeping, cooking, living or eating purposes. This excludes such enclosed spaces as pantries, bath or toilet facilities, service rooms, corridors, laundries, hallways, utility rooms or similar spaces.



2.5 The code will be applied to applications for new conservatories but if it is mainly made of glass then this is taken into account when considering the impact on neighbouring properties.

2.6 In applying the 45 degree code due consideration will be given to the ‘fall-back’ position afforded by permitted development rights.

2.7 The 45 code is not a rigid standard which must be met in every case. Rather it is an assessment tool which will be used in conjunction with other relevant factors, including daylight and sunlight tests to gauge the acceptability of proposals in terms of the overshadowing/loss of light impact upon neighbouring properties.

Forward Extensions

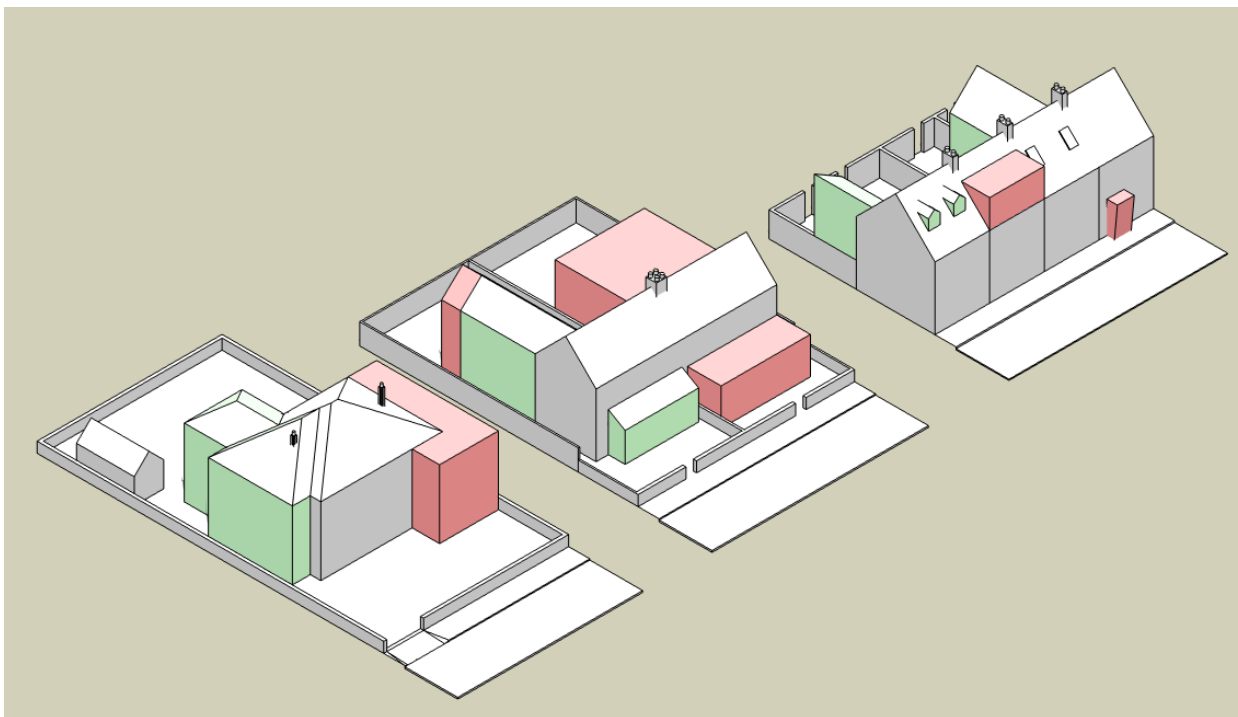
2.8 The front face of a residential property is normally the most important aspect of a house where it fronts onto a public highway. In order to maintain the characteristics of the dwelling and the surrounding streetscene large scale extensions to the front of properties will not normally be acceptable.

2.9 Front extensions to existing dwellings should:

- not extend beyond a clearly defined building line;
- be designed to incorporate design features of the original dwelling and should be constructed in materials used in the construction of the original dwelling;
- be sympathetic in scale and character to the building itself and the area generally; and
- be designed to respect the immediate outlook of adjacent residents and in this respect should not adversely affect the amenities they currently enjoy.

2.10 Two storey front extensions will be assessed on their merits taking into consideration the scale and character of the existing property and the surrounding area.

Picture 1



Side Extensions

2.11 Side extensions can be particularly visible in the streetscene. They can have a significant impact upon the character of a housing area. It is essential, therefore, that they are well designed to avoid having a negative impact upon their surroundings.

2.12 The character of a housing area derives not only from the design of individual dwellings but also from their layout and spatial relationship. The gaps between houses provide a sense of spaciousness and, in the worst cases, their inappropriate infilling or interruption results in a fundamental change in an area's character. In order to ensure that proposals respect the character and appearance of the host dwelling and the streetscene side extensions will normally be expected to accord with the following design principles:

- Side extensions should remain subordinate to the original property. This can be achieved by setting back the front elevation from the existing building line and where a two storey extension is proposed using a lower ridge height. As a general rule, side extensions should be of a size which is no more than 50% of the overall width of the original dwelling or three metres whichever is the greatest.
- In order to prevent two storey and first floor extensions becoming visually connected (creating a continuous terrace effect detrimental to the established streetscene) a minimum distance of 1 metre between the outside wall of the extension and the side boundary should ordinarily be maintained. This also gives the benefit of external access to the rear of the property. Where this is not feasible a setback and a lower ridge height would help offset the terracing effect thereby helping to maintain the character and appearance of the surrounding streetscene. Exceptions will only be made where the character of the area is such that the introduction of a terracing effect will have little impact on the streetscene or where the dwelling is on a corner plot.
- Two storey or first floor side extensions should ordinarily be set back by a minimum of 1 metre from the front elevation of the property unless individual circumstances mitigate the design benefits gained by such a setback.
- The roof pitch and design should reflect that of the host dwelling.

- Where the dwelling occupies a corner location, the side extension should not normally project beyond the return street frontage.
- The design of the extension should also take into account any significant difference in level between the application site and the adjoining property.

Conservatories

2.13 Given the purpose and design of conservatories, they can give rise to problems of loss of privacy and overshadowing for adjacent properties.

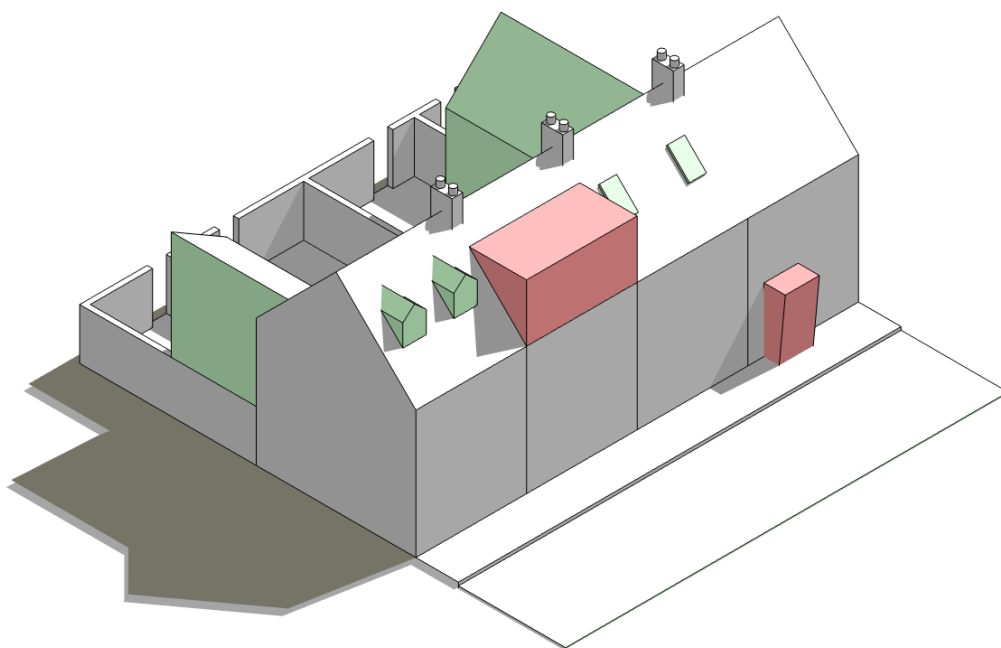
2.14 Conservatories and sun lounges should adhere to the same guidelines as single storey extensions. Due to their purpose, they are however constructed largely from glass and this will be taken into account when considering the impact on neighbouring properties. Where the conservatory is to be constructed adjacent to the common boundary of a property, the Council will normally request that the common side elevation is constructed from obscured glass or another opaque material as appropriate. A suitable screen fence may be acceptable, but in such circumstances the Council will ensure such screening will be retained via the imposition of a planning condition.

Dormer windows/Extensions into roof space

2.15 Dormer windows should not be so large that they dominate the roof, and should be of a scale that is in keeping with the property. Extensions into the roof space should respect the plane of the original roof and should be appropriately proportioned and positioned in respect of the eaves and the ridge so as not to detract from the original form of the building.

2.16 Dormer extensions should usually be set back from the eaves, should not be higher than the ridge, nor extend the full length of the roof, and should be designed to reflect the proportions of the windows below.

2.17 Extensions into the roof space should be designed to incorporate the design features and materials of the original dwelling.



Porches

2.18 Although many porches may be erected under permitted development rights it is still important to ensure that a new porch reflects the design and character of the property and appears part of the original property (and not as an obvious addition). Details such as materials, arrangement of windows and roof pitch should complement the original building's design, age and scale.

Garages and outbuildings

2.19 Domestic garages should follow the same guidelines as those for extensions and should be of a high quality of design especially where their location is prominent. Garages should be subordinate to the house and unobtrusively sited in relation to existing houses and the streetscene. They should not restrict access to neighbouring properties, drives or garages.

2.20 Garages to existing dwellings should be designed to incorporate design features of the original dwelling and should normally be constructed of materials used in the construction of the original dwelling.

2.21 Where a garage is to be accessed directly from the road, it should be provided with a minimum drive length of 6 metres to ensure that a vehicle can be parked fully within the curtilage of the property so as not to obstruct the highway.

Walls and fences

2.22 The design and detailing of boundary gates, walls and fences, particularly on highway frontages, plays an important role in defining the character of all residential areas. Means of enclosure can be very prominent in the street scene, and can have a high visual impact. It is therefore important to ensure that the style and materials match or compliment the existing style of the boundary treatment in the surrounding area or, where appropriate, the dwelling itself.

2.23 The safety of users of the highway is of paramount importance. Therefore, there should be no detrimental impact upon highway safety. The erection of walls and fences adjacent to a highway should be sited in such a position that the required visibility splays are maintained free of any obstruction.

Balconies and Decking

2.24 Balconies and decking which are close to boundaries and overlook neighbouring properties can have a significant impact upon privacy both within neighbouring properties and outside amenity areas.

2.25 Generally, decking should be at, or close to, ground level. Raised decking will not be allowed where it would result in significant overlooking of a neighbouring garden/yard or a main living room window.

2.26 Balconies, to the front of dwellings will generally be resisted and are unlikely to be granted consent where they will be visible within the wider street scene. Balconies are more likely to be approved in relation to detached dwellings with spacious gardens or where a staggered building helps maintain privacy.

2.27 In some cases privacy issues from balconies can be overcome by screening, for instance with frosted glazing, or by inseting the balcony into the building or roof.

Materials

2.28 Materials should normally be in keeping with and reflect those of the host property. The use of contemporary materials will also be permitted provided that they also reflect and respect the characteristics of the host property and the surrounding streetscape.

2.29 Special regard should be given to the use of materials within Conservation Areas and should normally be traditional materials unless a coherent argument is made to use more contemporary materials.

New development

3.1 All new development, including new dwellings, will have some bearing on neighbouring properties and it is important to ensure that the impact does not result in a significant loss of privacy, outlook or light for occupiers of new dwellings and existing dwellings. The design and layout of new development should ensure that reasonable privacy and light is provided for surrounding residents and occupiers, particularly in relation to residential use and enjoyment of dwellings and private gardens. Spacing between the windows of buildings/dwellings should achieve suitable distances for privacy and light, whilst also preventing cramped and congested layouts.

3.2 In order to achieve these objectives, the following minimum standards will be applied to new residential developments:

Minimum Privacy Distances⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾

Main facing elevation to main facing elevation containing window/s serving a habitable room

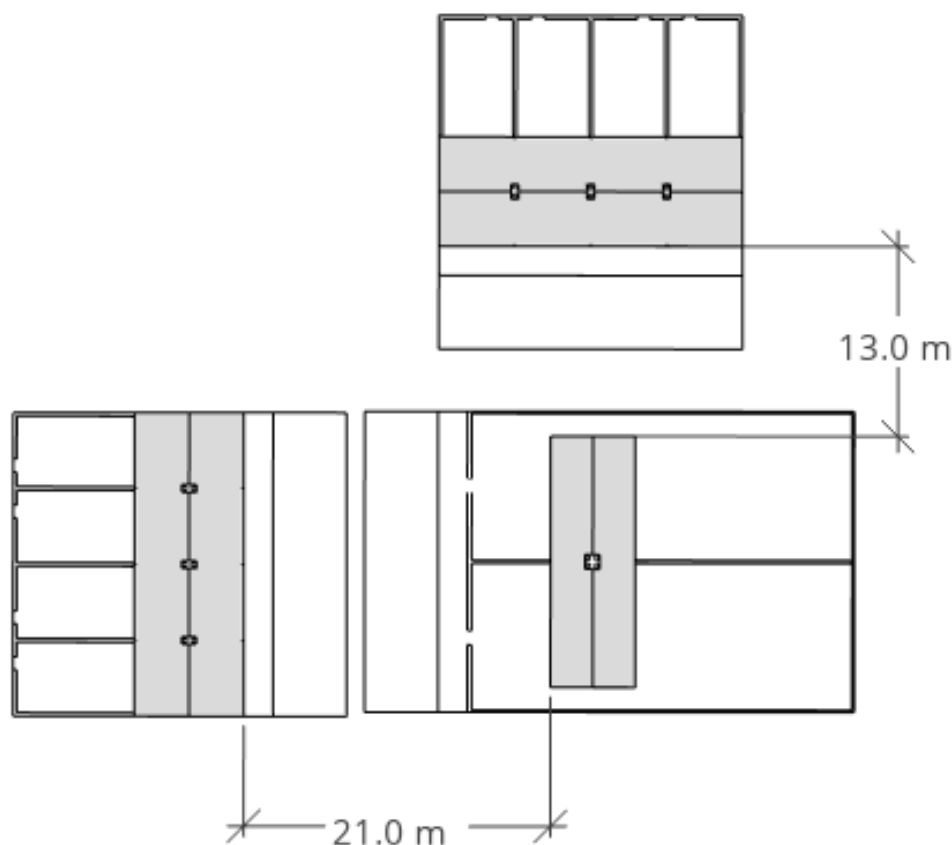
- 21 metres between two storey buildings

- 18 metres between bungalows

Main facing elevation to gable wall which does not contain a window serving a habitable room

- 13 metres to two storey gable

- 10 metres to single storey gable



Factoring in changes in levels, storey heights and mitigating factors

3.3 Changes in levels and the storey heights of buildings will either exaggerate or diminish overlooking, loss of light, shadowing and overbearing impacts. To compensate for these changes the distances cited above should be increased by 3 metres for every additional storey height.

3.4 Where there is a significant change in levels, the minimum separation distance will increase by 1 metre for every 1 metre that the floor level of the development would be above the affected floor or ground level of the neighbouring property.

3.5 It is not intended to apply the standards rigidly. For example, distances may be relaxed where the impacts on privacy can be reduced. This may occasionally be achieved, using obscure glazing, boundary treatments, restricted openings and directional windows. There may also be scope to relax distances between public facing elevations within housing schemes to allow for a variation in layout where this will add interest and help create a sense of place. Such a relaxation will normally only be allowed if it can be demonstrated that future residents will still enjoy a satisfactory level of privacy and outlook.

3.6 Distances may also be relaxed having regard to the character of an area. Shorter distances than those stated above could be considered in those urban areas typified by higher densities. It will however be important to ensure that the amenity of existing residents is not significantly impacted upon. Similarly, greater distances may be required in some suburban and rural areas where the predominant character of the area exhibits greater separation distances. Distances may vary where this is necessary to protect the historic interest and setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets such as listed and locally listed buildings and conservation areas.

3.7 Nevertheless, where new development forms an interface with existing housing any relaxation in standards will only be permitted where it is clearly demonstrable that the privacy of existing residents will not be significantly compromised. Prospective residents can decide whether or not to move into a new house unlike existing residents who have already invested in their homes. It is therefore important to ensure that the amenity that existing residents can reasonably expect to enjoy is not significantly compromised.

Gardens

3.8 Developments should incorporate usable, attractively laid out and private garden space conveniently located in relation to the property or properties it serves. It should be of an appropriate size, having regard to the size of the dwelling and character of the area.

3.9 The length of gardens will generally be dictated by the minimum distancing standards but should be no less than 9 metres unless site specific circumstances allow for a reduction in size.

iii A reduction may be permitted if the affected window is not the main source of natural light to the room or for the reasons set out in paragraphs 3.5 - 3.7



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