

THE LOWDOWN ON... BUILDING A KITCHEN EXTENSION

FROM NAVIGATING THE PLANNING PROCESS TO THE CORRECT PROCEDURE FOR BUILDING REGULATIONS, ARCHITECT JAMES DALE OUTLINES THE BEST APPROACH

When planning your kitchen extension, the first thing to think about is how you want to use the space. Ask yourself how the new kitchen should work compared to how it currently functions. To form the brief, your architect will need a set of plans, your proposed budget, a time frame and a list of things you do/don't like. Any other information about the address – for example, if you live in a Conservation Area – will be helpful for your designer at this stage.

1 Be realistic about your budget when it comes to achieving the design you want. If you're working with a fixed amount, you might have to make design compromises. Work with your architect as part of a collaborative process to create an extension design that works for you.

2 If you're adding a kitchen extension to a house in an urban location, party walls are one of the main aspects to consider. Another element to think about is space – for example, not every terraced house can accommodate a kitchen that's large enough to incorporate an island. As an architect, it's like putting together the pieces of your client's brief like a puzzle to make sure the kitchen doesn't feel overcrowded.

3 The beauty of many city homes is that you can apply to do pretty much any type of extension you want, bearing in mind that your proposal is going to be assessed against planning policy. For a terraced Victorian home, for instance, the standard kitchen extension would be a 3m deep side or rear extension, a full side return structure or a wraparound design. So long as you're hitting the key points in planning policy and not impacting your neighbours, you should be able to make your extension design a success.

4 When it comes to applying for permission for your kitchen extension, there are a few routes you can take depending on what you'd like your project to achieve. The first option is Permitted Development (PD). Under this set of rules, you can build an extension that stretches 3m from the back of your terraced or semi-detached house, 4m for a detached house. There are also height limitations you'll need to factor in, plus the construction materials should match the original property. PD rights don't apply if you live in a Conservation Area or your house is listed. The full list of rules can be found at planningportal.co.uk.

If you want a larger kitchen extension (a structure that projects up to 6m from the back of your house) you can go through the Prior Approval process. Apart from size, the extension would still fall under the same rules as PD. However, even if your proposal hits all the criteria, if your neighbours object you'll need to apply for planning consent.

For a kitchen extension, the third option is to submit a householder planning application. You can ask for a lot more under this category. For example, though the footprint of the addition might still fall under PD guidelines, you could use different cladding materials to those on the original house, such as tiles, metal or timber. You could also put your application in to exceed 6m.

5 To develop an extension design that's viewed favourably by the planners, your architect's proposal will be informed by local and national planning policy. If you're going for something that's potentially contentious, it's worth pointing out to the council why it works from a design perspective, and why the proposal doesn't impact on anyone else. For a kitchen extension, you shouldn't need the help of a professional planning consultant in most cases.

6 Any kitchen extension needs to meet the standards laid out by Building Regulations. They are statutory and in place to ensure certain standards are met regarding the safety of the building, thermal performance, etc. One route is to engage your own private Approved Inspector to monitor the progress of the build for you. The other option is to go through the council. If you take the latter path, you have two choices: one is to submit your plans for full approval. Here, the local authority will check your engineer's drawings and may ask for further information if they have queries. The other way is to submit a building notice one week before work begins on site. The inspector would come out to assess the site, and any queries would be picked up there. I'd always recommend going for full approval – you don't want the Building Control office turning up and having to change something once you're already on site. Once the build is finished, you'll get a completion certificate to show the work is up to standard.

James Dale Architects (jamesdalearchitects.com) is a London-based architectural practice specialising in contemporary and thoughtful designs. Its portfolio always includes a kitchen at the heart of a design, whether as part of an extension, conversion or refurbishment project.

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A side extension and ground floor reconfiguration created space for a kitchen-diner in this design by Amos Goldreich Architecture (agarchitecture.net). The extension was made by resting timber fins onto the brick party wall. A rooflight invites the sun in

