

# Guidance notes

## Alterations and extensions

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Your guide to altering or extending your home.

The Buildmark policy document for your home excludes anything affecting, or caused by, alterations or extensions to the home carried out after the date of completion. So, if you are planning an alteration or extension, please read this guide carefully.



## What is an alteration or extension?

An alteration is building work that changes your home, such as:

- removing an existing wall or partition
- replacing windows or doors, or adding new ones
- laying a patio or significantly altering the ground levels around your home
- carrying out work to drainage, plumbing or electrical services
- installing additional insulation to cavity walls.

An extension is building work that results in additional space to the home, such as adding:

- a new room (including rooms in the roof), or making an existing room bigger
- a conservatory
- a porch
- a garage, or changing an existing garage into a habitable room.

## Why you need to be careful

NHBC would not be liable for any damage or problems that were caused by your alteration or extension. Therefore, you need to make sure that the building work is carried out carefully to avoid damaging, or adversely affecting, your home. Examples of things that you should consider are listed below.

### Damage

- Your home has a load-bearing structure and it is important that any alterations or extensions do not adversely affect this. It may not be obvious which parts of your home provide structural support to other parts, so you should always get professional advice before making changes to walls, floors, ceilings and roofs.
- Care must be taken when digging in the ground close to the existing foundations of your home, to avoid undermining or damaging them.
- Care must be taken when digging near drains and services (such as water and gas pipes, and electricity and telephone cables), or building over them, to avoid causing damage. It is also important that access points, such as rodding points and manholes, are not covered over as they are needed to allow access for maintenance and to clear blockages.
- The external walls of your home have been designed to keep moisture out. Alterations, including adding insulation to cavity walls, can affect their resistance to moisture.
- Damp proof courses prevent dampness in your home, so it is important that they are not damaged or bridged.

### Health and safety

- Your home was built to meet fire regulations and allow you to escape safely if a fire were to occur. Any alterations or extensions must take account of this.
- Walls, ceilings and floors that separate you from your neighbours are designed to provide resistance to fire and sound. It is important that any work carried out does not reduce their effectiveness.

- Your home may have ventilation to ground floors, walls and roofs to prevent the build-up of moisture, to provide combustion air for the safe operation of heating appliances, or to prevent gases building up. It is important that any ventilation in your home is not blocked or covered over.
- Some walls, floors and ceilings have gas-tight layers in them to stop gas or moisture vapour entering your home, so it is important that they are not damaged.
- Flue terminals are needed for the safe operation of heating appliances, so it is important that they are not blocked, covered over or modified.

#### Restriction of access

- Alterations and extensions may make your home less accessible for disabled visitors and less suitable for existing and future occupiers as they grow older.

### How to avoid problems

If you are planning an alteration or extension, you should consider the following.

#### Get professional advice

A professional building surveyor, structural engineer or architect should be able to give you reliable advice on alterations and extensions. They should also guide you through all of the related technical and legal issues.

#### Get the necessary approvals

Finding out what approvals you might need before you start work will reduce the likelihood of problems (and delays) once work starts.

- Contact your local authority to find out if the work that you are considering needs planning permission or building control approval (or a building warrant, if your home is in Scotland).
- If you live in England or Wales, bear in mind that work to walls and floors that separate you from your neighbours may be subject to the Party Wall etc. Act 1996.
- If you don't own the freehold of your home, you may need permission from your landlord or Housing Association.
- If your home is a listed building, you may need Listed Building Consent.
- If you intend to remove trees, check that they're not protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

#### Use competent contractors

Ask your friends, colleagues and neighbours if they can recommend a reputable builder.

Electrical alterations should be carried out by a professional electrician. NICEIC (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting) and ECA (Electrical Contractors' Association) keep registers of approved electricians.

Work on gas appliances in your home must only be undertaken by a Gas Safe registered engineer.

OFTEC (Oil Firing Technical Association) has a register of technicians competent in working with oil-fired equipment.

HETAS Ltd (Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme) operates a registration scheme for heating engineers skilled in the installation and maintenance of solid fuel heating systems.

## Further information

If you live in England or Wales, you may find the following contacts useful:

Planning Portal  
[www.planningportal.gov.uk](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk)

Department for Communities and Local Government  
Tel: 0303 444 0000  
[www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

If you live in Scotland, please contact:

Building Standards  
Tel: 08457 741 741  
[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

If you live in Northern Ireland, please contact:

Planning NI  
Tel: 028 9041 6700  
[www.planningni.gov.uk](http://www.planningni.gov.uk)

## Other contacts

ECA (Electrical Contractors' Association)  
Tel: 020 7313 4800  
[www.eca.co.uk](http://www.eca.co.uk)

NICEIC (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting)  
Tel: 0870 013 0382  
[www.niceic.com](http://www.niceic.com)

Gas Safe Register  
Tel: 0800 408 5500  
[www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

OFTEC (Oil Firing Technical Association)  
Tel: 0845 658 5080  
[www.oftec.org](http://www.oftec.org)

HETAS Ltd (Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme)  
Tel: 0845 634 5626  
[www.hetas.co.uk](http://www.hetas.co.uk)



NHBC Claims

NHBC House, Davy Avenue, Knowlhill, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK5 8FP

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