

## **SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE**

### **DORMER EXTENSIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Extending into the roof can be a very cost-effective way of providing additional accommodation. It usually will involve the loss of space on the ground floor for a stairway (which can result in the loss of a usable room) but experience indicates that extending in this way can usually provide at least one additional apartment.
2. It is also important to appreciate that not all properties are suitable for dormer extensions. This is normally because the roof pitch combined with the depth of the house is too shallow to give sufficient head height. Also, in limited cases, dormers to the front of houses may not be suitable because they would change a particular architectural character in a house or the attractive or striking character of a group of houses as for example in the traditional miner's rows within Newtongrange.
3. Where the installation of dormers would have a detrimental effect on the character of an area the Council will not support them. In such instances, however, it is often the case that roof lights will be allowed and it is also normally the case that, subject to their size and design, dormers may be built to the rear of houses.
4. The principal concerns for the planning authority is that dormer extensions, like any form of extension to a property, do not look out of place, and spoil the appearance of the house or surrounding area. Because they are placed on the roof, dormers can be much more noticeable than ground floor extensions. The Council has formulated detailed policy for house extensions which is contained in the Local Plan. The policy sets out a series of general requirements for extensions, as well as several specific policies for dormers and front porches. This guideline explains how the Council wishes the policy to be put into practice for dormers.
5. The purpose of this guide is also to assist applicants and their agents. By explaining the Council's policy for this type of extension it will hopefully avoid problems at an early stage, saving valuable time during the processing of the planning application. It should be noted however that compliance with the guidelines does not automatically guarantee approval of planning permission.

#### **GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

6. While increasing the accommodation of a house dormers can also add to their architectural interest. It is important that they do not detract from the appearance of the property or result in a material loss of amenity to neighbouring houses. Extensions that reflect the style of the original are most likely to be successful. Novel architectural solutions, however, can also be acceptable.

##### **Scale and proportion**

7. Dormers should be designed as a dormer *window*, rather than as a large box extension. It should be only sufficient in size to provide the windows that are needed to light the new room(s) plus the depth of construction to form the side walls or 'cheeks' to the dormer. Dormers are sometimes proposed to be larger than this with wide solid vertical faces to the sides of the windows. This can give the dormer a bulky "box-like" appearance making its proportions and design look at odds with the rest of the house. This can not only spoil the appearance of the house on which the dormer is being built, but it can also have an adverse effect on the character of the area as well. Under normal circumstances the side walls to the dormer are unlikely to require a thickness beyond 200mm, so as a general guide, the width of the dormer should not extend beyond the window frame by more than 300mm to either side. This will allow a comfortable margin for unusual roof construction and a wide variety of cladding materials.
8. For the same reasons it is important that the bottom of the glazed area of the dormer is as close as possible to the plane of the roof – so that it has the appearance of "rising" out of the roof. Only a minimal vertical face should be required between the window frame and the plane of the

roof (normally no more than 100mm). Where a larger face than this is being proposed it suggests the pitch of the roof is too shallow to accommodate a dormer or that it is being built too close to the wall head of the house.

### **Positioning of the dormer**

9. It is important for the dormer to finish below ridge height. The plane of the roof should normally extend beyond the top of the dormer with preferably at least 500mm between the ridge and the roof of the dormer.
10. Dormers should not normally rise in the same plane as the wall of the house. In nearly all cases dormers are required to allow the use of *existing* attic space. Where dormers rise off the wallhead, both traditionally and in modern examples, the house has been designed as a building with more than one floor. The eaves are consequently set above the floor level of the 'attic' room and the wall of the house rises up to either side of the dormer window (traditionally to its mid-point). It is consequently a feature taken into account in the design of the building as a whole.
11. Consequently where dormers are being provided to allow use of existing attic space, they should be set back, away from the wall head. If built in too forward a position they can be unduly dominant and ungainly, appearing immediately above the eaves. Rarely will they be related to the design and proportions of the house. If their design follows the guidance in 8 above they will automatically be placed back from the wallhead. How far away the dormer will start will depend on the pitch of the main roof.

### **Width of dormers**

12. In older houses, pre First World War and earlier buildings, dormers appear more in keeping with the character and scale of the building when the width of the glazed area is narrower than that of the openings on the floor below. For this reason, particularly on the front of houses the walls to the dormer will preferably extend only a little beyond the width of the existing openings. In more modern housing, particularly post Second World War, wide windows in houses become more common. In these cases the width of the whole dormer should not normally extend beyond that of the existing window openings.

### **Single Dormers**

13. In some cases it will not be practical to follow the existing pattern of openings with two or more small dormers. Where a single wider dormer may offer the only solution (for example to provide head height to a stair landing as well as light to a bedroom) this may be allowed provided its proportions and detailing are acceptable. This will normally only apply to the rear of the property. In such cases the glazed areas should be sub-divided by a mullion and follow the proportions of the existing window openings. As a general rule the front face of such individual dormers should not normally exceed two metres in width.

### **Width of the roof to be occupied by dormers**

14. Dormers should not occupy a predominant proportion of the roof area. When two or more dormers (of a rectangular plan) are proposed their cumulative width should not normally exceed 35% of the width of the roof. Some dormers have a 'bay' type plan where they broaden as they rise up the roof. This can allow a greater proportion of the roof width to be used without significantly increasing the prominence of the extension. In these cases the total width of such dormers (measured at their widest points) should not exceed 45% of the width of the roof. (The cumulative width of the *front faces* of these types of dormer should not exceed 35% of the width of the house). In general the width of dormers should not exceed 2 metres, or 2.5 metres where of a bay design. In some exceptional circumstances wider dormers may be acceptable where their size relates well to the scale of the building, for example where the building is of significant size, depth and width of two or more storeys and with a large roof.

### **Materials**

15. The dormer should use materials already in use on the house or ones complimentary in appearance to them.
- On buildings with slate roofs, the cheeks and roof of the dormers should be slate or lead, (zinc may be acceptable in some instances) depending on its design;
  - On heavily profiled roofs (e.g. pantiles, rolled tiles) slate, lead, zinc or rosemary tiles can be used successfully;
  - On concrete tiled roofs it is important that small scale tiles are used for the side wall and roof pitches;
  - Fascias should normally be in timber. Where UPVC is in use elsewhere on the house its use may be acceptable as a substitute for timber.

### **Privacy**

16. Concern from neighbours may result where dormers overlook either garden areas or windows in houses where these previously enjoyed a high level of privacy. Factors affecting this issue are likely to be the size of the dormers, the use of the room they are serving (bathrooms are not normally a problem) and how far they are from the garden or window in question (dormers positioned further up a roof may raise less issues than one close to the wall head). Loss of privacy is unlikely to be an issue in the determination of an application unless there is a material loss of amenity to neighbours.

### **Detailed Design**

17. The design of the dormers can incorporate a variety of forms, such as pitched gabled or hipped roofs, and very occasionally cat slide (on very large steeply pitched roofs) or simple, plainly detailed 'flat' roofs. They can incorporate glazed side walls where additional light is desired (this can be used successfully to give the dormer a more light weight appearance). The design of the windows should be provided to match or complement those of the house. Appropriate specification and detailing should result from a careful consideration of the design and character of the existing building, and its locality (for example on traditional houses the dormers should normally have either pitched gable or hipped roofs).
18. Where the windows are arranged symmetrically on the house, the dormers should normally follow this arrangement. Dormers and windows of the house should "line through" vertically, or where there is good reason why this is not possible they should be set in from the edges of the roof. (Pairs of dormers should be set in a similar distance).

### **Speaking to the neighbours**

19. You will be required to formally notify your neighbours when you submit your planning application. Although it is not a legal requirement, speaking to your neighbours about your proposals well in advance of this formal stage may be beneficial to you in submitting any planning application. Often people are concerned when there are building works close to their home. If they have been well informed and understand your intentions they may be less likely to object to the extension you wish to build. Uncertainty and misunderstandings can lead to objections. These can increase the time it will take to process your application. This is because additional procedures are triggered which require the Council to take full account of any third party representations.

### **Further Information**

20. While these guidelines apply to the whole of Midlothian it should be noted that in **conservation areas** additional requirements are likely to be in force. Similarly, the controls relating to **listed buildings** may result in dormer extensions not being possible. If you are unsure as to whether your building is in a conservation area or is a listed building please contact the Planning Information Officer (telephone number (0131 271 3302)).