

Is Planning Permission Necessary?

Understanding when you need planning permission

Last updated: 9 Aug 2025 | planninghandbook.com

QUICK SUMMARY

- Not all home improvements need planning permission
- Permitted development covers extensions, lofts, and outbuildings within limits
- Conservation areas and listed buildings have stricter controls
- Building regulations are separate and often still required
- Pre-application council advice can save time and money

Understanding Planning Permission Requirements

Not all home improvements require planning permission, but it's essential to understand when you need it before starting any building work. The rules around planning permission can be complex, and getting it wrong could result in costly enforcement action.

In England, planning permission is generally required for new buildings, significant alterations to existing buildings, changes of use, and certain types of development. However, many common home improvements fall under "permitted development rights" which means they don't require planning permission.

When Planning Permission is Required

You will need planning permission for:

- Building a new house or commercial property
- Making major changes to your home that go beyond permitted development rights
- Converting your home into flats or multiple occupancy
- Building in your garden that exceeds permitted development limits
- Changing the use of your building (e.g., from residential to commercial)
- Any development in conservation areas or on listed buildings

Permitted Development Rights

Permitted development rights allow you to carry out certain types of work without needing to apply for planning permission. These rights exist to help encourage appropriate development while protecting the environment and quality of life.

Common permitted development includes:

- Single-storey rear extensions up to 6 meters (detached houses) or 4 meters (semi-detached and terraced houses)
- Two-storey extensions up to 6 meters (detached houses) or 4 meters (other houses)
- Loft conversions with dormer windows within specific size limits
- Conservatories and garden rooms under certain conditions
- Garages and outbuildings covering no more than 50% of your garden
- Fences and walls up to 2 meters high (1 meter if adjacent to a highway)

Important Limitations

Permitted development rights may be restricted or removed in certain areas, including:

- Conservation areas
- National parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Listed buildings and their curtilage
- Areas subject to Article 4 directions

Building Regulations vs Planning Permission

It's important to understand that planning permission and building regulations are separate requirements. Even if your project doesn't need planning permission, it may still need building regulations approval.

Building regulations cover:

- Structural safety and fire safety
- Energy efficiency and insulation
- Access and facilities for disabled people
- Drainage and waste disposal
- Sound insulation

- Ventilation

Pre-application Advice

Before beginning any building work, we strongly recommend consulting your local council's planning service. This initial consultation can save you significant time and money by identifying potential issues early in the process.

Key areas to check include:

- Article 4 direction restrictions
- Whether your property is in a national park or conservation area
- If your building has registered historical or architectural significance
- Local planning policies that may affect your proposal
- Neighbour consultation requirements
- Environmental impact assessments

The Planning Application Process

If your project requires planning permission, you'll need to submit a planning application to your local planning authority. The process typically involves several stages:

1. **Preparation** - Gather all necessary documents, drawings, and supporting information
2. **Submission** - Submit your application with the appropriate fee
3. **Consultation** - The council consults neighbours and relevant organizations
4. **Determination** - The council makes a decision within 8 weeks (or 13 weeks for major applications)

Required Documents

A typical planning application requires:

- Completed application forms
- Site location plan (1:1250 or 1:2500 scale)
- Site plan showing the proposal (1:500 or 1:200 scale)
- Floor plans and elevations
- Design and access statement (if required)
- Planning statement explaining the proposal

Common Reasons for Refusal

Understanding why applications are refused can help you avoid common pitfalls:

- Design that doesn't fit with the local area
- Overdevelopment of the site
- Loss of privacy for neighbours
- Traffic and parking concerns
- Environmental impact
- Conflict with local planning policies

Getting Professional Help

While you can submit a planning application yourself, many people choose to use professional help, especially for complex projects. Professional services include:

- **Planning consultants** - Specialists who understand local planning policies and procedures
- **Architects** - Design professionals who can create compliant and attractive proposals
- **Planning lawyers** - Legal experts for complex cases or appeals

Planning Permission Costs

Planning application fees vary depending on the type and scale of development. As of 2024, typical fees include:

- Householder applications: £206
- Full applications for new dwellings: £462 per dwelling (up to 50 dwellings)
- Commercial applications: Variable based on floor space
- Listed building consent: £206

Additional costs may include professional fees, surveys, and supporting studies.

Next Steps

If you're unsure whether your project needs planning permission, we recommend:

1. Check your local council's planning portal for guidance
2. Consider seeking pre-application advice
3. Consult with a qualified planning professional
4. Review local planning policies and constraints

For comprehensive guidance on planning applications specific to your local area, browse our collection of planning handbooks covering councils across the UK.