

## Wicklow County Council

Pre-planning Guide No.2

# Domestic Extensions Including Independent Living Units



**This guide refers to the development of domestic extensions and in both urban and rural areas, including the development of independent living units (“Granny Flats”). It is designed to assist home owners who are considering building an extension to their home and also to assist architects, builders, planning agents etc who may be involved in the design process or in the making of a planning application.**

**It is not intended to be a complete and legal interpretation of all policies of the Council as set out in the County Development Plan or of the Planning Acts and associated regulations.**

**Applicants should always seek the advice of a suitably qualified professional in the preparation of any planning application.**

This guide is provided in conjunction with Chapters 5 and 6 of the County Development Plan, which outlines the development strategies, objectives and standards for domestic extensions in both urban and rural areas of Co. Wicklow.

### 1 Getting Started:

If you are considering the option of building an extension onto your home it is recommended that you start by taking the following considerations into account:

#### a. The type and size of the space you want to create:

- What type of rooms /space do you require – additional bedrooms, extended living areas, increased storage?
- Does the existing layout of your dwelling suit your needs? If not, can it be rearranged to achieve greater usability, sustainability and comfort within your home?
- How will the proposed new rooms / spaces connect internally with the existing rooms in your house and externally with your garden and the adjoining public realm?

#### b. The layout, location and orientation of your home and garden

- What direction does your house face and what parts of your existing dwelling / garden receive the most daylight / sunlight?
- How big is your side / rear garden and how much open space will be lost to facilitate the proposed extension?
- Are there any underground sewers, overhead power lines or other services within the curtilage of your home that will need to be avoided or relocated?

#### c. Neighbouring properties

Do you have any close neighbours? If so, where are the nearest windows and doors serving these properties and where are the private open space areas?

### 2 Design:

Given the range of house designs and site layouts throughout the County it is not possible to generate a prescribed set of 'rules' to apply to all extensions however, there are a number of basic principles that should be taken into account during the design process. If these principles are applied correctly, it should result in an extension that is well designed and that respects and protects the amenities of both your property and your neighbouring properties.

#### a. Respect the appearance and character of your existing property:

The design of an extension should be **sympathetic** to your existing house. This does not mean that it has to exactly match the existing style, height and finishes, but that it should complement the existing house and not look out of place.

A good extension is usually **subservient** to the main building i.e. extensions should be designed so that they look like extensions rather than a new house attached on to an old house. Extensions can reflect traditional aspects of the existing building, but contemporary extensions can also serve to complement the existing building

Extensions to existing dwellings should be **unobtrusive**, for example an extension to a single storey cottage would be best designed to incorporate a single storey extension in such a way which **does not distort the existing scale and mass of the development**.

### b. Respect the Residential Amenities of Adjoining Properties

#### Loss of Daylight / Sunlight

In designing an extension it is important to ensure that not only does your proposed extended dwelling have access to an adequate degree of daylight and sunlight, but also to ensure that the extension, due to its height or location, does not significantly reduce the amount of daylight / sunlight currently experienced by your neighbour.

#### Loss of Privacy:

It is important to ensure that both you and your neighbours enjoy a reasonable level of privacy in your homes and gardens and therefore careful consideration needs to be given to the design and layout of your extension and in particular to the location of any new windows.

- Your extension **should not provide for 'new' overlooking** of the private area of an adjacent residence where no such overlooking previously existed.
- In an existing developed area, where a degree of overlooking is already present, the new extension **should not significantly increase overlooking possibilities**. If for example a two-storey dwelling already directly

overlooks a neighbour's rear garden, a two storey rear extension with the same view will normally be considered acceptable.

- The layout of your proposed extension should be arranged so that rooms which may overlook neighbouring properties are non-habitable spaces such as corridors, bathrooms and stairways
- A minimum distance of 22m should be retained between directly opposing first floor levels in the rear elevation of two-storey properties.

In certain circumstances it may be difficult to design an extension that allows for appropriate levels of natural light and ventilation while also ensuring that the position / design of windows would not impact on the privacy of your neighbours. However, there are a number of design solutions that may be implemented in your design<sup>1</sup>, such as:

- ✓ The use of high level windows (with a sill level of 1.7m or higher above the internal floor level of the room) will allow light into the room but prevent overlooking.
- ✓ The use of angled windows to direct the view away from the neighbouring property
- ✓ The use of frosted or opaque glass with restricted openings in bathrooms, halls, and stairways
- ✘ Frosted or opaque glass should not be used in habitable rooms such as bedrooms or living areas

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<sup>1</sup> You should ensure that your design is fully in compliance with current building and fire regulations

### Trespass

No part of your extension including eaves, gutters; foundations, excavations etc should overhang or trespass on, adjoining properties without the written consent of the owners of these properties.

### **Size / Scale:**

There are no hard and fast rules about the size of an extension, but you should ensure that

- ✓ The extension respects the size of the existing house – it should not distort the scale of mass of the existing structure
- ✓ The extension does not reduce the area of the garden to such a degree that it affects the usefulness of the garden
- ✓ The site is big enough to accommodate the extension as well as all the other facilities that a house requires e.g. private garden, car parking, bin storage etc

### **Sustainability:**

Taking a sustainable approach to the design of a new extension can, as well as being good for the environment, save money on heating and electricity bills and make a more comfortable home. Information and guidance on cost effective improvements to the energy performance of your home can be found at [www.sei.ie](http://www.sei.ie) (Sustainable Energy Ireland)

**For information regarding Site Services and entrances please refer to sections 4 and 5 of this Guidance Document.**

## **3 Independent Living Units**

In independent living unit or 'granny flat' is used to accommodate a member of the immediate family, often an elderly parent, who while they have the ability and desire to live independently, **require** to live close to their family for additional care and support.

The construction or conversion of part of an existing dwelling into a 'granny flat' will only be permitted where the development complies with the following requirements:

- The need for the unit has been justified and is for the use of a close family member.
- The unit forms an integrated part of the structure of the main house – Only in **exceptional circumstances** will the conversion of an existing detached garage / store etc be considered.
- The unit is modest in size and in particular, it shall not exceed 45sqm and shall not have more than 1 bedroom;
- The unit shall **not** be sold or let as an independent living unit and the existing garden shall not be sub-divided;
- The structure must be capable of being functionally re-integrated into the main house when its usefulness has ceased. Permission for such units shall be restricted to a period of 7 years, after which it must revert to a use ancillary to the main house (e.g. garage, store, hobby room) unless permission has been

secured for its continuation as an independent unit for another period.

**The information / documentation that should be submitted with the planning application for an independent living unit should include:**

Details of the name of the proposed occupant and their relationship to the householder

Information explaining why the unit is required, such information should include medical evidence from GP (or similar professional) of the intended resident of the unit confirming her/ his medical condition and requirement/ need to move from current place of residence

Details of the proposed occupant's current place of residence and details as to why this residence is unsuitable to meet their needs.

**Please note:**

**The above is not a definitive list and you are advised to submit sufficient information / documentation which clearly outlines your particular circumstances and your particular need for an independent living unit.**

**Failure to submit sufficient information/documentation to demonstrate the need for the proposed development may prolong the assessment of your application or may result in an unfavourable decision.**

system is adequate to accept any additional wastewater generated by the proposed extension / independent living unit.

➤ If it is clear that the existing system will not meet the needs of the enlarged house, it will be necessary for you to submit detailed proposals to upgrade the system. Proposals for on-site wastewater treatment and disposal system must comply with the provisions of Wicklow County Council's Policy for Wastewater treatment and Disposal Systems for Single Houses (PE≤10)<sup>2</sup>, current EPA Guidelines and the Wicklow Groundwater Protection Scheme

➤ Generally, the Council will require the wastewater treatment system to be up-graded in each of the following individual circumstances:

- i. *The proposed Gross Floor Area of the extension is in excess of 33% of the GFA of the existing dwelling.*
- ii. *The number of bedrooms is being increased by > 50%.*
- iii. *The existing dwelling is semi-derelict.*
- iv. *The existing wastewater treatment system at the date of application would not comply with the previous codes of practice NSAI SR6 1991 or Wastewater Treatment Manuals Treatment Systems for Single Houses EPA 2000.<sup>3</sup>*

#### 4 Services:

##### On Site Wastewater Treatment System

If the existing house is served by an on-site wastewater disposal system (e.g. septic tank), it may be necessary for you to show that this

<sup>2</sup> This policy document is available to view at [www.wicklow.ie/planning/developmentmanagement/planningapplicationpack](http://www.wicklow.ie/planning/developmentmanagement/planningapplicationpack)

### Points to Note:

- Where circumstances (i) to (iv) above do not apply the Planning Authority may still require the upgrading of wastewater treatment systems in particular circumstances in the interests of public health.
- The upgrading of a system prior to or during the course of an application for an extension to an existing dwelling to meet unacceptable and only upgrading to the current standards will be permissible. the provisions of SR6 : 1991 or the EPA Manual 2000 is unacceptable and only upgrading to the current standards will be permissible.

### Bored Well

If the house is served by a well, again it may be necessary to provide information that the well can provide enough water and is of suitable quality to serve the enlarged house

### Public Mains

If the house is served by a main sewer / watermain, you should clearly show the location of this main on any drawings. Permission will not be considered for extensions on top of public mains, or within a certain distance of one. You should seek the advice of your architect with regard to separation distances required

## **5 Entrances:**

- It will be necessary in any application to provide full details of the existing entrance serving the house
- If the extension is of such a size that it may generate additional traffic movement or the

entrance does not currently meet safety standards (e.g. with regard to sightlines), you may be requested to submit proposals to improve the entrance

## **6 Applying for Planning Permission:**

In order to apply for planning permission you will need to complete a planning application form which is available from Wicklow County Council's offices or can be viewed on line at [www.wicklowcoco.ie/planning-forms](http://www.wicklowcoco.ie/planning-forms). You will also find a checklist of the plans and information that you will need to submit for a valid application. Following the receipt of a valid application, the planning authority will normally make a decision within 8 weeks.

### Points to Note:

Applicants should always seek the advice of a suitably qualified professional in the preparation of any planning application.

## **7 Exempted Development:**

Planning permission is not required for all domestic extensions. The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) have set out a number of categories of development within the cartilage of a house that are exempt from planning permission. There are usually certain thresholds relating to, for example, size or height. Where these thresholds are exceeded, the exemptions no longer apply and planning permission is required.

If you require clarification on whether or not planning permission is required for a proposed extension you can apply to Wicklow County Councils Planning Department for a declaration of Exemption (Section 5 referral).

It should be noted that the exemptions set out in planning legislation only apply to existing houses, they do not apply to:

- ✘ Houses under construction
- ✘ Apartments / duplexes

Points to Note:

It is the householder's responsibility to check if planning permission is needed for an extension and if so to obtain the appropriate permission

## 8 Useful References / Documents:

### **The Wicklow County Development Plan:**

This may be obtained from any office of Wicklow County Council (for a fee) or may be viewed online at [www.wicklowcoco.ie](http://www.wicklowcoco.ie)

### **Planning Guidance Leaflets:**

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government have published a series of leaflets which provide guidance on all aspects of the planning system, including:

PL1 – A guide to Planning Permission

PL2 – A guide to Making a Planning Application

PL5 – Doing work around the house - the Planning Issues

### **Sustainable Energy Ireland ([www.SEI.ie](http://www.SEI.ie)):**

Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) is Ireland's national energy agency. It provides useful information and guidance on energy efficient heating, sound proofing and other measures that can be incorporated into residential buildings

### **Building Research Establishment UK**

Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A guide to good practice - Paul J Littlefair.

### **South Dublin County Council – Planning Department ([www.southdublin.ie](http://www.southdublin.ie))**

House Extension Design Guide

This is a detailed guidance document which sets out good practice and advice on the approach to designing house extensions.