

Extensions to residential properties – review of planning permissions granted and policy considerations for draft Local Plan

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The National Park Authority's existing policy for extensions to residential properties is set out in the North York Moors Local Development Framework 2008 under DP19, Householder Development. The policy supports proposals for development within the domestic curtilage where the scale, height, position and design of new development does not detract from the character and form of the original dwelling or its setting in the landscape. Proposals must not adversely affect the residential amenity of neighbours, nor result in inadequate amenity for the existing dwelling. There are also specific requirements for annexe accommodation.
- 1.2 DP19 is one of the most frequently used policies with 2,121 planning applications approved between 1st November 2008 and 31st March 2018 and 131 refused. The policy is used to cover a wide range of circumstances including alterations and extensions to the main dwelling, loft conversions, porches, alterations to windows, works to garages and other outbuildings as well as the construction of new outbuildings and works to accesses and boundaries. The more substantial proposals are extensions to dwellings and conversions of outbuildings to provide additional living accommodation. These can alter the character of a dwelling and its surroundings as well as having policy implications in terms of changing the mix of dwelling sizes within a local community.

2. Initial review

- 2.1 In order to consider these issues for the new Local Plan an initial review of permissions granted for additional living accommodation was carried out in 2016. The electronic files for 38 permissions granted in 2015 were looked at and, although they were not a representative sample, they gave a 'snapshot' of the type of schemes coming forward including an approximate estimate of the extent of the proposed works. The permissions were all for works to provide additional accommodation, i.e. extra bedrooms/bathrooms and extra kitchen/ living space but excluded proposals for residential annexes.
- 2.2 The initial review showed that:
- Although there were no approvals in Helmsley, extensions were allowed to properties in villages of all sizes and in the open countryside;
 - 24 were new build extensions, 5 were conversions of outbuildings or loft space and 9 were mixed schemes, altering as well as extending the existing dwelling or converting and extending an outbuilding;
 - There were more two storey than single storey extensions (21 and 17 respectively);
 - The majority of approvals increased the 'footprint' of the dwelling by less than 30% (25 cases or 66% of the total). However, in 8 cases the footprint was increased by between 40 and 50% and in 5 cases the increase was greater than 50%.
- 2.3 In some cases the proposed extension or conversion made a clear improvement to the existing dwelling's appearance as well as providing additional accommodation. However, there were some extensions which made a substantial change to the form and character of the dwelling or resulted in an 'awkward' roofline. Proposals affecting one of a group of similar properties need to take account of the harmony of the whole group and semi-detached dwellings need to be considered with care to

avoid creating an un-balanced effect between the pair. There were examples of more and less successful proposals for these types of property within the group.

3. Policy considerations

- 3.1 The initial review prompted a discussion of the policy considerations for the new Local Plan and the results were included in a paper presented to the Authority's Development Plan Working Group on 19.01.17. The policy discussion centred around the following matters:
- a) What view should be taken on the number of large extensions being proposed in the National Park? A large extension is more likely to significantly alter the form and appearance of an existing dwelling and where it is a traditional farmhouse in open countryside or on the edge of a village it can have an impact on the local landscape. Properties which have been extended more than once can lose their original character.
 - b) Over a number of years large extensions will gradually reduce the stock of smaller more affordable dwellings in the National Park. It is for this reason that some National Parks have adopted policies which limit the size of extensions to 30% or 35% of the existing dwelling. Given rising average property prices in the North York Moors and the shortage of affordable housing for local people, the Authority could consider introducing a similar restriction.
 - c) Should there be stronger requirements regarding the design of extensions and the importance of understanding the form and character of the existing dwelling to help reduce the number of poorly designed proposals?
- 3.2 The Working Group discussion concluded that the draft Householder Development policy for the new Local Plan should include a restriction on the size of extensions and the supporting text should include guidance on design. This approach could limit the loss of existing lower priced housing stock and help conserve the traditional built form within the Park and the policy in the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan was drawn up taking these views into account.

4. Updated review of planning permissions granted 2017-2018

- 4.1 The initial review of extensions had been carried out at an early stage in the Local Plan preparation and included only a small sample of schemes. Also, the estimate of the scale of the permitted works was based on how much the *footprint* of the property was extended whereas the proposed new policy wording for the Local Plan is based on the *total habitable floorspace* not being increased by more than 30%. A further review of planning permissions was therefore carried out in 2018 in order to update the results based on a larger, more recent sample and check the scale of permitted extensions using the measure agreed for the proposed policy wording.
- 4.2 The updated review covered proposals for extensions to dwellings approved between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018, but excluding proposals for residential annexes. Most extension schemes were new build but some were a mixture of new build and refurbishment of the existing property and/or an adjacent outbuilding. Schemes which involved refurbishment of a separate outbuilding (i.e. ones which would not be incorporated into the main dwelling at the end of the works) were also excluded from the review as these would not be covered by the size restriction in the proposed new policy. Two schemes were recorded as refurbishment only where the extension was at first floor level and involved raising the height of the roof.
- 4.3 85 schemes were included in the review and key features of the permitted works were noted where the information was available in the electronic file. As with the initial

review the size of the extension relative to the existing dwelling was estimated since hard copies of the plans were not retrieved for accurate scaling with a rule. The total habitable floorspace of the existing dwelling was assessed in the same way as it would be under the proposed policy i.e. excluding existing extensions (unless built before 1st July 1948), garages, conservatories and outbuildings. Where possible, a note was made of whether the property had been extended before, excluding those which appeared to have been extended before July 1948. The number of bedrooms as existing and after the proposed works was also noted where this information was available.

- 4.4 Permission was granted for extensions to properties in settlements of all sizes in the National Park and in the open countryside. The most popular type of proposal was for a new build, single storey extension – these accounted for 41 of the 85 schemes reviewed (48%). The detailed results of the extensions review are set out below:

Table 1: Location of extensions - permissions granted 01.04.17 –31.03.18

	No. permissions	%
Local Service Centre (Helmsley)	2	2
Service Villages	19	22
Local Service Villages	4	5
Other Villages	33	39
Open Countryside	27	32
Total	85	100

Table 2: Type of extension works - permissions granted 01.04.17 – 31.03.18

	No. permissions	%
New build	61	72
Mixed New build/ Refurbishment	22	26
Refurbishment	2	2
Total	85	100

Table 3: Number of storeys - permissions granted 01.04.17 – 31.03.18

	No. permissions	%
1 storey	50	59
2 storey	35	41
Total	85	100

Table 4: Whether previously extended - permissions granted 01.04.17 – 31.03.18

	No. permissions	%
Dwellings previously extended – excluding conservatories	34	40
Dwellings with conservatory extensions	9	11
Not previously extended	42	49
Total	85	100

Table 5: Increase in total habitable floorspace - permissions granted 01.04.17 – 31.03.18

	No. permissions	%
10% or less	12	14
From 10% to 20%	37	43
From 20% to 30%	17	20
From 30% to 50%	10	12
Over 50%	9	11
Total	85	100

- 4.5 The majority of permissions increased the total habitable floorspace of the dwelling by no more than 30% (66 cases or 77% of the total). However, in 10 cases the total habitable floorspace was increased by 30-50% and in 9 cases the increase was greater than 50%. More than a third of the permissions (34 cases or 40% of the total) involved properties which had been extended before.
- 4.6 Many of the electronic files had details of what the proposed extension would be used for. The main uses were:
- Only 20 permissions (24% of the total) involved the creation of an additional bedroom, suggesting that it is a minority of extensions that are needed to make space for a growing family. There was no change to the number of bedrooms in 29 cases and in a further 35 cases the plans on file did not show the upper floor so it can be assumed that these did not increase the number of bedrooms either. The remaining case reduced the number of bedrooms -creating 4 larger rooms from the existing 5;
 - Schemes often had more than one purpose, for example, moving a ground floor bathroom to the first floor and creating a larger kitchen/diner downstairs;
 - The majority of extensions were to create some form of extra living space (a proposed use in 31 cases) or a larger kitchen or kitchen/diner (a proposed use in 14 cases);
 - Garden rooms, sun rooms and conservatories, which also create extra living space, made up all or part of 14 permissions;
 - Porches, boot rooms, utility space or a ground floor w.c. formed part of 10 permissions;
 - Enlarging/re-arranging existing rooms were part of 4 permissions;
 - 2 schemes included the creation of swimming pools;
 - Providing more accessible accommodation for a disabled occupant was mentioned in just 2 cases.
- 4.7 The design of the majority of the extensions was appropriate and there were a few examples of good design where the extension works would enhance the property - especially where untidy features such as earlier extensions and conservatories were improved or replaced. However, quite a number of the proposals, although not poor, did not improve the appearance of the property, for example where a complicated new roof arrangement was introduced or the design was for a 'wrap-around' extension. Aggrandisement and insensitive treatment of an unlisted heritage asset was a serious concern in one case. The files showed 6 cases where there was considerable negotiation between applicants' agents and development management staff over the scale and design of the proposal, generally resulting in a smaller more sympathetic extension being permitted than originally suggested. Care is needed in

these circumstances, however, since a scheme that is an improvement in comparison with the original suggestion may still not be a well-designed proposal.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The updated review suggests that the main arguments considered by Development Plan Working Group in 2017 are still relevant. There are still a small but significant number of proposals for very large extensions, some of which do change the character of the dwelling, and a considerable proportion of proposals affect buildings which have previously been extended. There are still some concerns over the quality of design of extension proposals put forward.
- 5.2 It is considered that 30% of total habitable floorspace is a reasonable general upper limit for extensions in the National Park and would help maintain a balance of dwelling sizes in the overall housing stock. 77% of the permissions in the review would fall within this limit which enables the creation of extra bedrooms as well as the additional living space that many households want. The proposed wording of the new Householder Development policy is that extensions should fall within this limit *unless there are compelling planning considerations in favour of a larger extension* which would allow for special circumstances, for example, if more additional space were needed for disabled adaptations.
- 5.3 The supporting text to the policy includes a paragraph on the importance of good design that is sympathetic to the original building and its surroundings. It would be worth strengthening the wording by adding two points: first, that proposals which represent inappropriate aggrandisement will not be permitted; and second, that buildings of a variety of different ages and styles are all part of the cultural heritage of the National Park and it is important for all extensions to conserve and complement the character of the dwelling.

October 2018