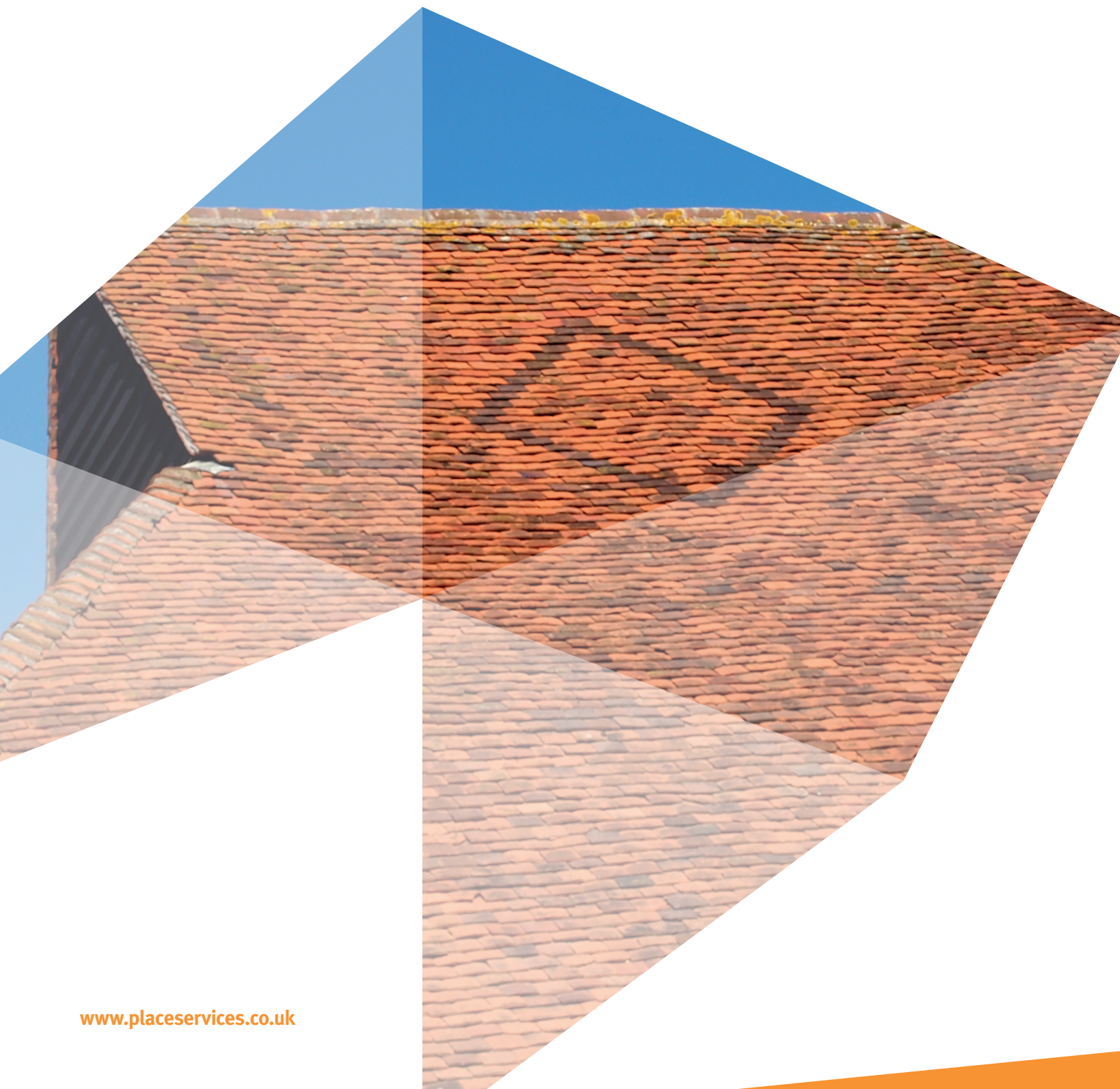


Collective Intelligence
Sustainable Solutions



Design guidance for extensions
to Listed Buildings

Our house isn't big enough!



Our house isn't big enough!

Design guidance for extensions to Listed Buildings



Essex County Council

The current pressure to extend small rural and urban traditional houses is a worrying trend: the enlargement of many such properties into standard three or four bedroom dwellings risks damaging their historic character. The problems that arise when Listed Buildings are extended have already been touched upon in the County Council's advisory leaflet 'Conservation in Essex no. 4, Historic Buildings'. In this document the matter is dealt with more fully, and the problems and requirements associated with particular building types are considered in detail.

The Character of an Historic Building

Buildings are listed as being of 'Special Architectural or Historic Interest' in order to protect their particular character. Listing is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport who takes into account various criteria in deciding whether to include a particular building on the Statutory List. The criteria reflect the intention of providing a truly objective assessment of a building's worth in order to achieve the necessary consistency of standard throughout England.

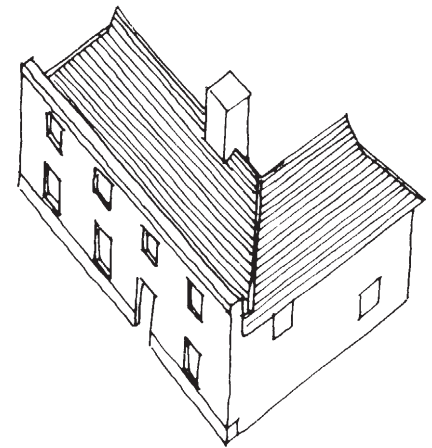
In understanding the character of a building, it must be realised that each one was initially conceived as an overall design. Most people will have little difficulty in recognising the carefully proportioned harmony of a typical Georgian facade which can be upset by the least unsympathetic alteration. The more elaborately designed architecture of Victorian buildings can also be damaged by ill-conceived additions. To the layman, it may not be evident that a medieval timber-framed building is also the product of a very deliberate design process involving the manipulation of plan, form and elevations to achieve a similarly conscious effect. The assumption that such old buildings are merely a picturesque accumulation of timber and plaster is an error of the first order.

The majority of old buildings have undergone alterations which may, or may not, have obscured the merits of the original concept. It may be that the later works were so thorough as to leave only a few clues as to the original design. More often a building will exhibit a dual personality, with a typical medieval plan behind a regular 18th or 19th century front.

Usually these later changes are the product of considerable care and artifice, and deserve protection as an important aspect of the character of the building. Not only do they make a significant contribution to the appearance of the building, they also represent a response to changes in fashion and life-style, and are important evidence for the social and architectural historian.

To avoid damaging the character of a building, it is necessary to achieve a full understanding of its fabric and of its relationship to its neighbours and its particular setting. To do this requires specialist architectural and historical knowledge. Essex is fortunate in having a number of architectural practices experienced in dealing with historic buildings, and those contemplating obtaining listed building consent would be wise to seek such informed advice before arriving at

detailed proposals. The officers of the County Council's Historic Buildings and Conservation advisory team are always willing to offer the benefits of their considerable experience and knowledge, preferably at an early stage in the deliberations, but however valuable their advice, it should be sought as additional help rather than as a substitute for the employment of a properly qualified agent.



Many old buildings represent a blend of different styles which contribute to their unique character. Here an 18th-century brick facade conceals a typical medieval plan comprising a hall and cross wing.

What to Protect

From the foregoing, it can be seen that a new extension may only be one more event in a long history of change. It could be argued that any new extension, however conceived, would only be one more reflection of changing demands and the natural expression of our times. However, the introduction of progressively more exacting planning legislation is also part of changing social attitudes, and has necessitated more rigorous assessment of proposed alterations to historic buildings. Such legislation takes into account a wider interest in our collective cultural history, and is a recognition of the accelerated rate of change which has been such a notable feature of the second half of the 20th century. This rapid period of change has seen a total break with vernacular and traditional methods of building and design which naturally harmonized with the buildings erected by previous generations. In these circumstances, protection

must be afforded to the structure and all those features and aspects of a building that made it worthy of listing. All statutory lists of historic buildings contain written descriptions of the buildings included in them which will be of assistance in this process. However, such entries are, of necessity, brief and should not be taken as a complete inventory of all that is of value in a building. Members of the public can examine these lists at the offices of their District Council or obtain copies of individual descriptions from the Historic Buildings and Conservation Section of the County Planning Division at County Hall, Chelmsford.

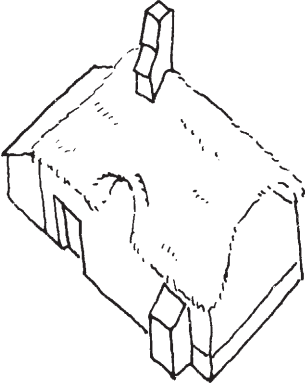
With all extension proposals, it is extremely important to avoid damaging the existing historic fabric of the building. An extension should not be positioned in such a location as to necessitate the removal of original timber framing, masonry walling or any feature of intrinsic merit. The cutting of new openings

through original studwork, top plates, tie beams or girts should be carefully avoided, as should damage to important features such as wall bracing or old windows. Similarly extensions should not obscure or spoil a well designed elevation or unbalance an existing harmonious composition. Changes resulting from an extension should not damage the internal spatial qualities of the existing building, nor damage or obscure an historically valuable arrangement of rooms.

The setting of an historic building is an important aspect of its character, and is also protected by listed building legislation. It is not simply a question of preserving an attractive view. It is also important to protect or provide a setting appropriate to the original use and function of the building, so that its special character remains unimpaired. By this reasoning, a farmhouse needs to be surrounded by open space and associated outbuildings.

Extensions to particular types of buildings

Small dwellings



A small artisan's cottage typical of the Essex countryside

Small size may be one of the factors which influence the decision to list a particular building. Small dwellings include many medieval hall houses, as well as labourers' and artisans' cottages of the last four centuries. Lodge cottages, toll houses, canal lock cottages, and level crossing keepers' cottages often fall into this category, but are dealt with later. The small size of these buildings is itself a source of visual quality, part of the buildings' essential character, and a potent reminder of past social conditions. Usually such buildings can serve as one- or two-person homes without the need for anything but the most minor of lean-to extensions. The Local Planning Authority may well resist any form of substantial extension that would damage their special character as minor buildings in the countryside or urban landscape. Small cottages constructed as semi-detached pairs require equally sensitive treatment, and knocking two into one poses potential problems. Where this is done, they should retain the appearance of two dwellings. Prospective purchasers of any such building who are intending a substantial extension should first approach the the Local Planning Authority to ascertain its views.

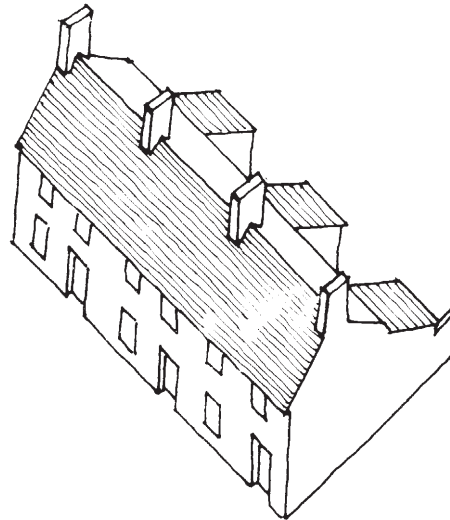
Small cottages are also very sensitive to changes to their immediate setting. Often it is characteristic for them to be isolated, standing in the middle of a large plot of land. The Local Planning Authority may seek to avoid the sub-division of, or encroachment onto, the plot to protect this special character. In such situations, it is appropriate to locate a new garage block, or other ancillary buildings, remote from the dwelling so as not to compromise its isolated appearance.

The terrace of small cottages

A number of terraces of rural or artisans' cottages have been listed within Essex. The character of such dwellings can be damaged by unsuitable front, rear and flank extensions. In many cases each unit has a relatively narrow frontage, with the result that bulky rear extensions which disrupt the overall shape of the building and reduce light to the interior lead to a desire to enlarge the opening on the front

elevation. Rear extensions can also affect the amenities of the neighbours by cutting down light to the adjoining buildings. Frequently such terraces were built to one uniform design which can only too easily be damaged by porches and other alterations.

Making one unit out of two or more adjoining cottages is sometimes possible, but this too has its difficulties. Superfluous front doors will need to be retained externally but blocked on the inside. Usually it is necessary to retain the internal spatial divisions including, where these are important, the individual staircases. Some terraces of cottages prove, on examination, to be a later sub-division of one or more houses. In these cases amalgamation of two or more units may be a more natural process, and there may well be advantages in reconstructing the appearance of the original building. As with the small individual cottage, the Local Planning Authority will seek to prevent extensions that would damage the characteristics of this building type.



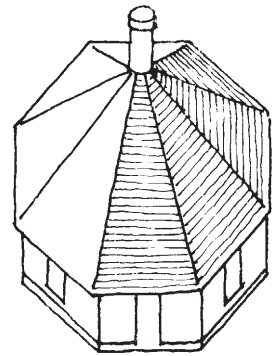
A terrace of 19th century cottages with traditional back extensions

The lodge cottage and other small purpose-built dwellings

The landscape of Britain is dotted with small gate lodges, turnpike cottages and small dwellings associated with canals and railways, all of them reminders of a vanished way of life. Typically these are architect-designed simple geometrical buildings with a square, circular or a polygonal plan form with a central chimneystack. With such buildings *any form of extension will seriously compromise their inherent character*. In circumstances where the original building is too small to remain a viable dwelling unit, then an alternative non-residential use may well be preferable in the interests of securing its long-term protection. Uses such as holiday lettings might be a practicable option requiring only basic facilities. Properties of this type have been successfully used in this way by the Landmark Trust. Some 19th century lodge cottages involve a consciously picturesque grouping of small

blocks and thus lend themselves more satisfactorily to minor extensions. Care must be taken to ensure that small additions do not spoil any carefully calculated asymmetry.

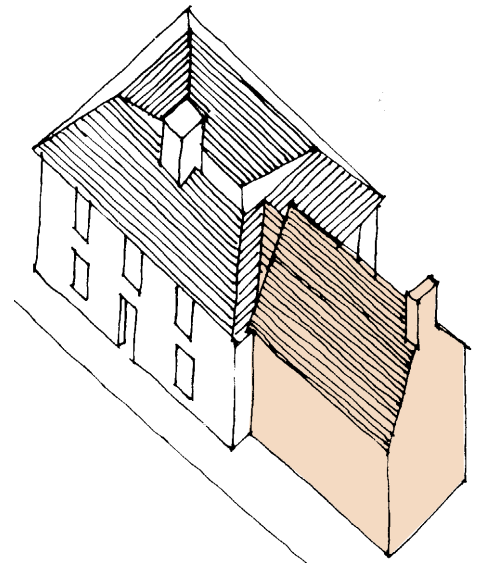
A polygonal lodge cottage



Houses with symmetrical facades

Houses where a facade has been deliberately designed to achieve a symmetrical effect should not be extended in such a way as to damage this quality. Although this may appear to be a statement of the obvious, it has not always discouraged such a solution being put forward. There may be occasions where identical extensions on either side of a facade can reinforce the symmetry, but this may overstretch the building thereby damaging the composition. Generally such matching wings should be lower in height and of a restrained design allowing the original centre to retain its dominance. On occasions, a single side extension can be achieved by setting it back slightly and using different materials. Where the building has strong edge definition in the form of columns, quoins or pilasters, a slight set-back may be all that is necessary.

Symmetrical facades can sometimes accept a single side extension so long as it is sufficiently differentiated



Whilst these problems are most likely to occur with the classical facades of the 18th and 19th centuries, late 16th and 17th century houses were also

often designed to a relatively symmetrical format. Houses that have retained this formal characteristic are rare and correspondingly precious; in such cases lateral extensions may prove unacceptable.

Extensions to houses with mansard or gambrel roofs

Cottages or small houses with roofs of

broken pitch, either gambrel or mansard, are a characteristic feature of the Essex countryside. Typically they date from the 17th and 18th centuries, and were an expedient adopted to create more space in the attic storey. When it is proposed to provide a new rear extension to such a

property, it is better to avoid repeating the roof form, as observation will confirm that there is virtually no historic

precedent for such an approach, and it tends to confuse the visual picture. In such cases the best approach is often the one that seeks to confirm or underline the historical development of the building rather than to obscure the evidence for this process.

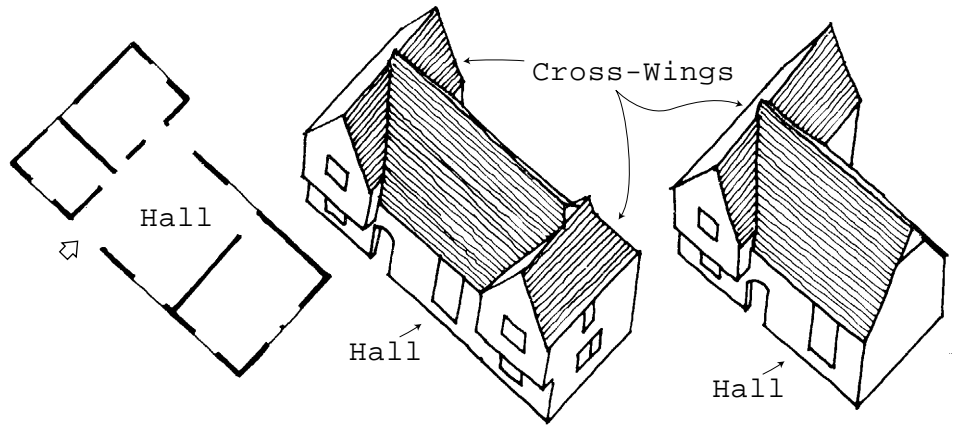
Characteristic Medieval house types

Medieval timber-framed buildings survive in remarkably large numbers throughout Essex. Examples can be found to illustrate virtually all the phases of the medieval house plan. As argued above, such houses were carefully designed to accommodate the contemporary way of life and provide a visually satisfying external appearance. Where such a building has retained its general external characteristics, these should not be obscured by inappropriate extensions. The basic medieval house types are described below.

The in-line plan form

Historically this is the most ancient of plan forms, and for small rural dwellings has survived in use until relatively recent times. All the accommodation was provided in a long rectangular block under a continuous ridged roof. Typically, such dwellings in their original form consisted of a central hall, open to the roof, with two-storeyed chambers at each end. Most commonly they are of three or four bays, but occasionally two or even five bays are found.

Lateral extensions, unthinkingly provided, can seriously damage the carefully proportioned exterior and obscure the original character of the house. In the case of exceptionally good examples that have survived substantially unaltered, the Local Planning Authority will be mindful of the need to retain their historic appearance unchanged. The long wall jetty house is a later variation of this type



Houses consisting of a hall and cross-wing(s)

with a jettied or projecting first floor running the full length of the facade. A lateral extension of this house form again runs the risk of spoiling the intended proportions. The Wealden house type is relatively rare in Essex, and examples must be jealously protected. This is a cross between the in-line plan and the hall with cross-wings, having a recessed central hall flanked by cross-wings covered by a single roof.

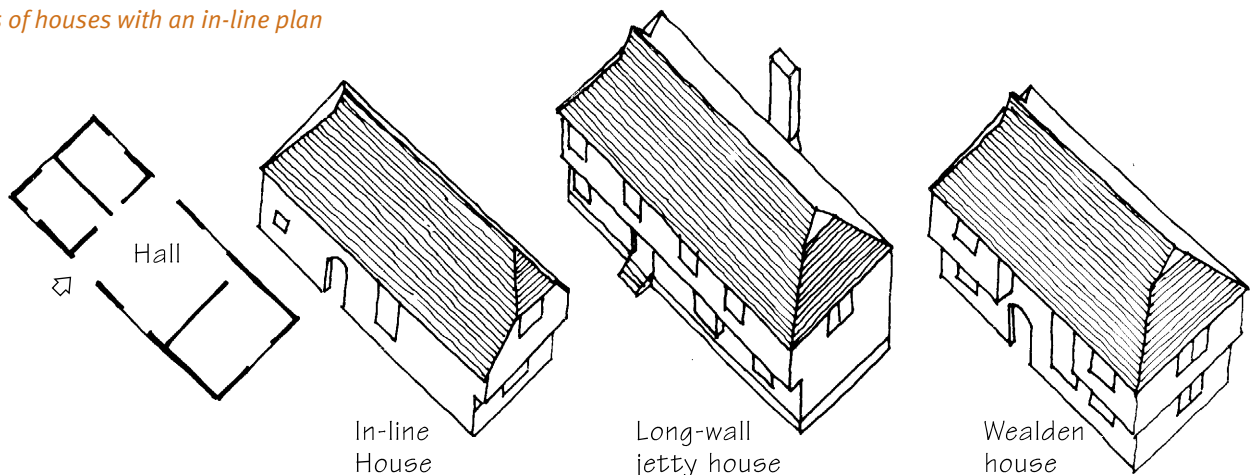
The hall with cross-wings

The hall with cross-wings is the most familiar medieval house type and was a development of the in-line arrangement to provide larger ancillary chambers at each end. Such houses had a central open hall and each wing had its own independent roof at right angles to the main range. Many early in-line houses were converted to the cross-wing format

and frequently the cross-wings are of differing ages. Some houses were only provided with one cross-wing which housed all the auxiliary functions and which was three or four bays deep rather than the usual two. There is therefore good precedent for using the cross-wing type of structure for extending traditional timber-framed houses. To avoid pastiche or building a mock medieval addition, every effort should be made not simply to mimic period style, whilst at the same time maintaining a sympathetic mass and scale.

As with the in-line house type, there are some existing examples of double or single cross-wing houses that are so remarkable and so complete that it would be wrong to contemplate any substantial extension to them.

Examples of houses with an in-line plan



Small cottages can easily be compromised by the provision of detached garages or stabling too close to the building, thus spoiling their inherently isolated nature.

Extensions: general considerations

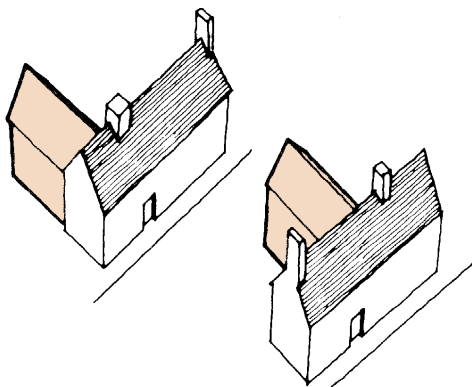
There would be an evident advantage in offering a few simple and easily applied rules against which all proposals could be assessed. However this is not a realistic option, as each case has to be viewed on its merits and simplistic criteria could cause great harm. The size of an extension may not always be the paramount concern as there may be cases where a substantial new building would enhance or positively contribute to the overall character of the building. It is sometimes suggested that a new extension should not dominate an existing building, but in fact many old buildings have large extensions that contribute successfully to their appearance. Again there are occasions where an extension that is taller than the parent building will seem perfectly satisfactory and a happy addition to the overall complex. More often than not attempts to make an extension look smaller than it are doomed to failure and result in a contrived and unnatural appearance.

Types of extension

Some of the common types of extension will now be discussed in detail. The majority of old buildings in Essex have their long axes parallel to the road, an arrangement that for simplicity's sake is assumed in the following text.

The rear wing forming an 'L' or 'T' shaped plan.

A rear wing can often provide a satisfactory extension of a type for which there is good historical precedent.

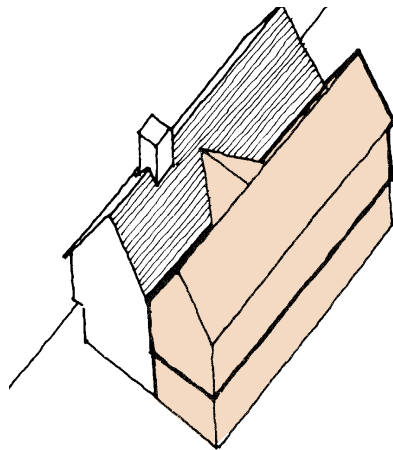


A new rear wing of one or two storeys has the advantage that it will not affect the front elevation and may link up well with the existing internal circulation system. There are abundant historic precedents for this as medieval houses often had a kitchen or outhouse range at the service end of the block. If the rear elevation is an important feature of the building, then this solution may not be possible. A more frequent problem is that the addition would reduce lighting and ventilation in the existing building. In some cases it will

prove possible to solve this by the provision of a new opening in an opportune location, but this must be achieved without damage to the historic fabric of the building.

The double-pile or parallel two-storey rear range solution

The creation of a double-pile building is a traditional way of enlarging a house, but only practicable if problems of lighting and access can be overcome.



This solution is occasionally practicable where there are existing single storey extensions along the back of the building, and where it is possible to make more than one opening in the rear of the existing building without unacceptable damage to its fabric. A disadvantage is that the presence of the extension may reduce lighting and ventilation to the rooms in the existing building to an unacceptable level. Such an extension will also conceal or largely conceal the existing rear elevations, and there are many instances where this will not be acceptable. Where there are existing flat or pitched roofed extensions it should not automatically be assumed that the addition of an upper floor will always be considered appropriate.

Lateral flank extensions

There are occasions when extending one end of the building and its roof in a lateral direction is an obvious and appropriate course of action. In some cases, however, this type of extension can produce an awkward overstretched effect, making the building appear too long for its height. This can on occasion be solved by a change in wall materials or other forms of visual articulation to give expression to the new extension. With cottages comprising ground and attic storeys, this type of extension will usually involve unacceptable destruction of end wall framing for access purposes. Symmetrically designed facades also cannot be readily extended in this way, and are considered in greater detail below.

Cross-wing extensions

The addition of a cross wing at one end of a facade was a common medieval solution to extending, or improving, a building (see above). Despite our changing requirements in respect of room layouts,

it remains a useful answer where circumstances allow.

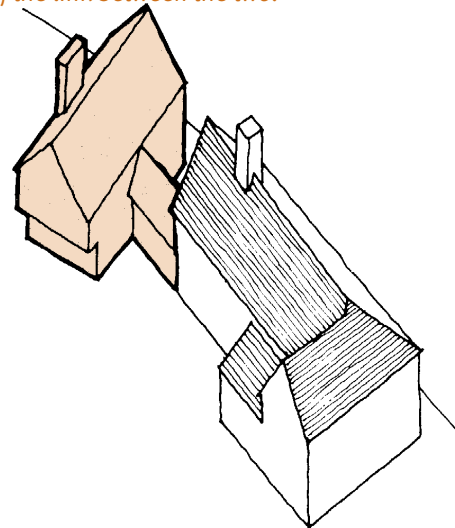
Extensions into the roof space

Numerous old houses contain attics within the roof void, and it is often tempting to try and make better use of this space. However, attic rooms are often underlit with small dormer windows. Introducing more accommodation risks damaging the appearance of the building through forming numerous dormers or rooflights, a solution that should always be avoided. Dormer windows should only be minor features in a roof slope and, where they exist, should be relatively evenly spaced and separated by substantial areas of unbroken roof plane. Similar problems can occur where it is intended to extend a building laterally. Again, it is tempting to make the space available in the new roof as large as possible, with too many un-sightly dormer windows.

Extending into the roof should not be permitted where it would involve damage or the removal of historic roof timbers, or undesirable changes resulting from the provision of new stairs. It should also be borne in mind that extension into an upper floor may bring onerous Building Control requirements requiring unacceptable upgrading to provide a protected means of escape and periods of fire resistance.

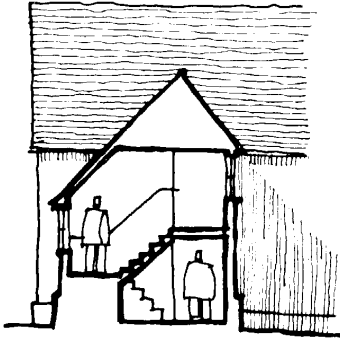
The separate block with corridor link

Sometimes an extension can be accommodated in a separate structure attached to the main building, the principal problem often being the design of the link between the two.

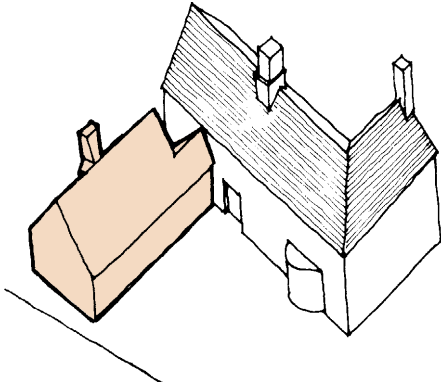


New accommodation can sometimes be provided in a separate block linked by means of a short ground floor corridor. Alternatively a narrow two storey link with a low ridge may be used to provide a degree of articulation between the two structures. Such a scheme is usually dependent on there being ample space to accommodate a dispersed plan form. The visual separation afforded by the link will often allow the new extension to have an independent character, even appearing as an adjoining building rather than part of the main house. Some architects prefer this approach as it allows greater freedom

of design. The link itself is the likely cause of problems as it is difficult to find an appropriate form of expression for this historically unprecedented kind of structure. Though often suggested, the transparent minimally detailed link is rarely a success in relation to the old building, generally having the temporary character of an exhibition display stand. (This solution has proved notoriously unsuccessful in extensions to churches). A short link incorporating a dog-leg staircase can be another useful form where the asymmetry of the roof is concealed by the two



separated blocks.



The front extension

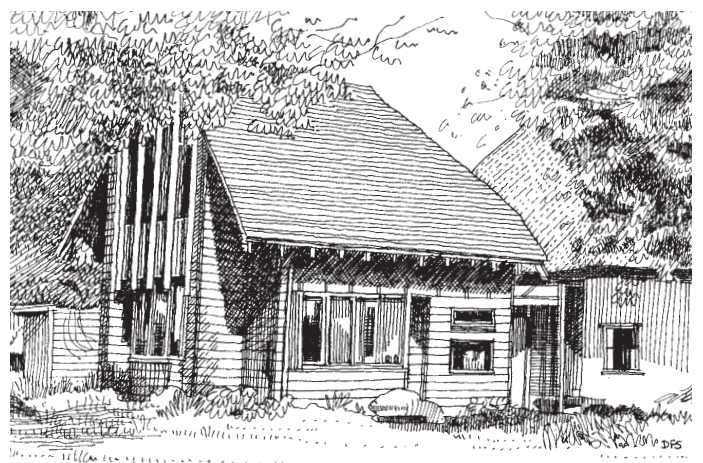
It may be possible to enlarge a building set well back from the street by means of an extension to its front elevation.

There are only rare occasions where a

Examples of new extensions



New extension (left) at Lindsell matching the original building



Linked and obviously new extension to a thatched cottage (Wimbish)

building is set well back from a frontage and an extension in the form of a forward projecting wing may be acceptable. Generally the facade is the most important elevation, and covering or concealing it will be totally unsatisfactory. However, there are some attractive historic examples of front extensions. They usually include a lower linking element and a markedly asymmetrical principal building. Clearly such an extension can have a major impact upon the setting of the building, and this must be fully assessed before reaching any final decision.

The porch problem

Although the most modest of extensions, the addition of a porch can cause damage far outweighing its physical size. Fully enclosed porches were virtually unknown before this century, and are therefore out of keeping with most traditional houses. A substantial enclosed porch can successfully obscure a large part of the front elevation of a small cottage and in such cases must be avoided. There are occasions where an internal lobby can be formed without damage to the character of the building.

Conservatories

The current enthusiasm for conservatories is such that they merit separate consideration. A guidance note, 'Conservatories and Historic Buildings', is obtainable from Essex County Council. Generally conservatories are intended to function as extra rooms rather than hothouses, the purpose for which they were originally built. Such buildings rarely pre-date 1800. They are thus inappropriate as extensions to many types of listed houses, the more so when, as often happens, the proposal is for a big conservatory with over elaborate period styling. In the case of large houses built within the last 200 years, a conservatory may be an attractive addition. It is much less likely to be suitable for a small or medium-sized house or cottage. Where there is a genuine need for such an extension, a modest lean-to is likely to be more acceptable than a bulky polygonal-ended structure set at right angles to the main

house. The conservatory can often be made more sympathetic by having a natural slate or pantile roof instead of a glazed one. There are also practical advantages to not having glazed roofs. If the final result would fail to enhance the existing building, a conservatory should not be contemplated.

Historic building extensions in the Metropolitan Green Belt

National, County and District planning policies vigorously seek to restrict additional building within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Such policies apply in some of the southern and western districts of Essex (i.e. Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Epping Forest, Harlow, Rochford), and obviously place limitations on the scope for extending historic buildings. Each district has its own particular policies which will often involve a given maximum area or volumetric limit. In meeting such requirements, it is still vital to achieve an architecturally satisfactory solution which properly protects the character of the existing historic building. In such cases all parties will need to display a measure of flexibility.

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Tel: 01245 437027

Also available: 'Conservatories and Historic Buildings' (Conservation in Essex No. 7)

Government policy and guidance on listed buildings and related issues can be found in 'Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment' (1994) available from The Stationery Office.

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