

Supplementary Planning Guidance – House Extensions

1. Introduction

This guidance has been produced to identify the key points to consider in achieving a successful design for a house extension: one that protects the character of the property and the local area and does not adversely impact on the living conditions of neighbours. It supplements specific policies within the West Berkshire District Local Plan and is consistent with national and regional planning policies. Following consultation and adoption by the Council it will be a material consideration in the determination of applications for planning permission.

Not all extensions and ancillary buildings need planning permission, but it is advisable that homeowners follow the guidelines, whether or not planning permission is required. They are not, however, inflexible rules and there may be some cases where alternative approaches may be acceptable. Officers will discuss sketch proposals from homeowners and advise whether planning permission or listed building consent is required. Queries concerning building regulations should be submitted to the Building Control Service.

TIP

Seek Advice: The guidance is based on experience in providing advice on proposed extensions, but is not a substitute for professional help from an architect, surveyor or building engineer.

It should be noted that more rigorous design criteria may be applied in conservation areas, for all listed buildings and in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Other criteria also apply in the countryside outside settlements and these are outlined in the Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on Replacement Dwellings and Extensions to Dwellings in the Countryside.

TIP

Talk to the Neighbours: Before making a planning application, it is advisable to discuss the proposal with any neighbour that is affected. If an extension is built close to a boundary, access to a neighbour's property may be needed to build and to maintain it, and the neighbour's consent would be required. This permission would still be required even after obtaining planning permission from the Council.

2. Key Principles

When considering applications for extensions the Council will look at the following issues:

- **the character of the area** –any extension should be designed in relation to the whole street or group of surrounding buildings.
- **the design**– whatever type the property is, the overall height and bulk, the materials used, the roof shape, the size and proportion of doors and windows should all be

taken into account to make sure that the extension reflects and adds to the appearance of the house and its surroundings. Generally extensions should be subservient to and not dominate the original dwelling.

- ***the effect on neighbours***– any design will need to consider how the extension may affect the living conditions of neighbours. Issues to be considered include privacy and outlook from neighbouring properties and the degree of overshadowing.
- ***car-parking provision and road-safety*** -if car parking arrangements are affected the Council will need to be satisfied that no road safety problems are likely to arise
- ***private outdoor space*** – it is important that dwellings retain gardens of an appropriate size for the type of property and neighbourhood.

3. The Character of the Area

A good design can enhance the neighbourhood and the desirability of the property. Factors to consider when planning an extension include: -

- ***Surrounding Styles***

Some areas may feature particular materials, designs and details which give the area its individual character. An inappropriately designed extension can spoil the appearance of the area through the introduction of alien features such as flat roofs or over-large dormer windows. Village Design Statements have been produced by the local community and have been adopted as supplementary planning guidance for some villages in West Berkshire. These contain guidelines, which can help conserve the character of villages, and should be used to inform any development proposals.

TIP

Village and Town Design Statements have been prepared for some settlements in West Berkshire. These give important guidance on design in the local area

- ***Gaps between buildings***

The spaces between buildings often make an important contribution to the character of an area. Side extensions which extend to a property boundary may contribute to an inappropriate “terracing effect”. This is particularly noticeable where an extension continues the roof line of the original building and where a neighbouring property could also be extended in a similar manner. An extension to one property should not prejudice any proposal for a similar extension to a neighbouring dwelling. Extensions which are set back and lower, such that they are read as subordinate additions, are generally more acceptable in the street scene.

- ***Established pattern of development***

The layout of an area should be considered and any formal character to the area should be respected when designing an extension. If the street or group of buildings has a well defined “building line”, an extension or garage which extends forward may appear incongruous within the street scene. Corner properties in particular need very careful treatment because of their prominence.



4. Design

An extension in harmony with the original building can enhance the property and the area. Any extensions should have regard to the following:

- **Building Form**

The basic shape and size of the extension should normally be subservient to the design of the original building.

The shape, pitch and style of the roof will be a significant factor in achieving an appropriate design. The best looking extensions generally have a simple shape. Unusual plan shapes lead to complicated roof constructions that can often look out of place.

Extensions should generally have pitched roofs and where practicable, the pitch of the new roof should match the pitch of the existing main roof. Flat roofed extensions look out of place against older houses with pitched roofs. They are usually unacceptable for two-storey extensions, for visual reasons. There may be cases where a flat roof on a single storey extension could be desirable in order to reduce its bulk, for example where appearance is relatively unimportant, but where overshadowing or neighbour's outlook are significant issues.

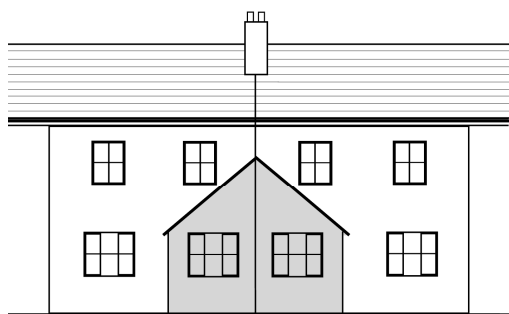


Front Extensions. The impact on the street scene is of paramount importance when determining applications for extensions to the front of properties. Most houses have been designed with a harmonious façade, which could be unbalanced by a front extension. Factors to be considered include: -

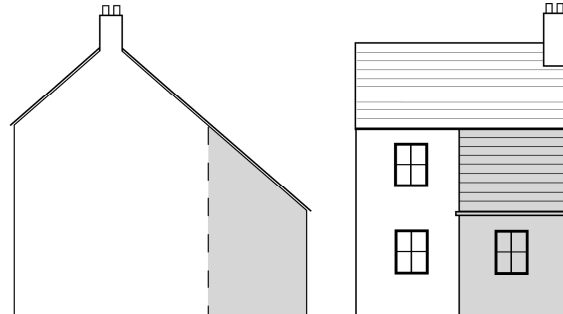
- The prominence in the street scene
- the relationship with neighbouring properties
- the depth of front gardens
- the landscaping.

Two storey front extensions are not generally acceptable and single storey extensions other than porches, should not project significantly from the main front wall of the house. Larger front extensions may be acceptable where the dwelling is detached and set well back from the road in a good sized plot, where there are a number of similar extensions in the immediate area or where an adjoining dwelling or garage already projects to the front.

Rear Extensions. Extensions to the rear of a property are the least likely to have a major impact on the house and surroundings. When extending a semi-detached or terraced property it can be desirable to follow any established pattern of extension. For example, in terraced houses, where a rear extension is paired with a similar extension on a neighbouring house it can appear to be part of the original design and also help to increase privacy to the rear garden.



Paired extension to rear
of terraced houses



Sympathetic rear extension

Side extensions. In general side extensions should be sympathetically designed to appear subservient to the main house. A side extension could unbalance the appearance, especially if the house is one of a semi-detached pair. It is usually recommended that the extension be set back from the main building by at least one metre and two storey extensions should not rise above the existing eaves level. In some instances, it may be appropriate to match the roof height of the extension to that of the existing property.



Conservatories. The same guidelines for side and rear extensions apply to conservatories. Conservatories which are close to boundaries should not result in loss of privacy to an unacceptable degree.

TIP

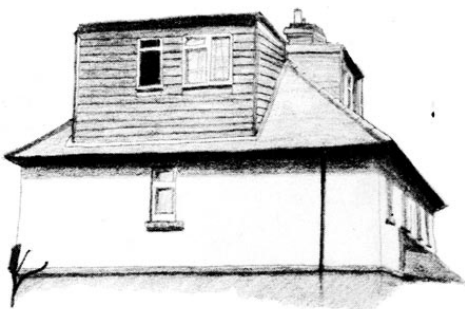
Design against Crime - When undertaking building work it is important to consider how it will affect the security of the property, and it could be a good time to review the security of the whole house. Thames Valley Police are able to provide advice on crime prevention and detailed advice about designs and standards to prevent crime is available on the web site at www.securedbydesign.com.

- **Materials Should Match**

The materials for a new extension should be carefully chosen to match the original building. It is important that not only the colours and tones but also the texture and size of materials such as bricks and roof tiles, are selected to match the original materials. Under some circumstances, for example when matching materials cannot be obtained, it may be appropriate to use different materials. These should enhance the original building and help make the extension appear subservient.

- **Windows and Doors**

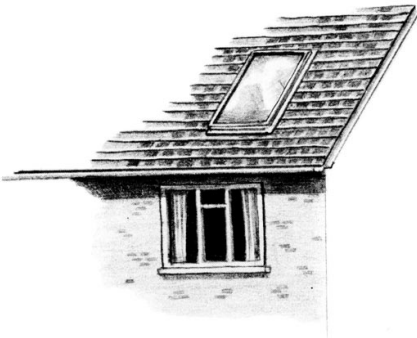
When designing an extension it is important to consider the size, style and proportion of windows and match as far as possible to those on the original house. The ratio of solid wall to openings is also important. Dormer windows can present very prominent features, which dominate a building. If headroom allows, rooflights can provide a less obtrusive alternative. Dormers should be seen as a means of providing light and ventilation to an existing roof space and not as a means of increasing floorspace in the dwelling. They should be designed to keep their size to a minimum and their position as low as possible on the slope of the roof, whilst being within the eaves. The design of dormers should reflect that of the main roof and the dormer windows should match the window style of the house. Flat-roofed dormers should normally be avoided.



A large flat-roofed dormer that dominates the house and perhaps next door as well



Acceptable dormer that is set into the roof and matches the windows below



If headroom allows, rooflights are less obtrusive

- **Architectural Details**

The extension will be more attractive and more sympathetic to the original house if similar architectural detailing is used. Replication of the head and cill details to windows and doors can be an effective way of integrating the old with the new. Similarly roof details on the verge, eaves and ridge of the roof can be detailed in the same way as the original building and achieve a sense of continuity. The bonding of the brickwork and matching of the mortar type and joints are also important, so that the new brickwork blends with the old.

TIP

Energy Efficiency – Designing an extension provides an opportunity to increase the energy efficiency of the property. Factors such as orientation and layout, use of landscaping as well as energy efficient technology can all contribute. Advice is available on the website www.saveenergy.co.uk.

Water Conservation – Designing an extension also provides an opportunity to increase water efficiency, for example with water efficient appliances or grey water recycling. Guidance can be obtained from the Environment Agency at www.environment-agency.gov.co or Thames Water at www.thameswater.co.uk/waterwise

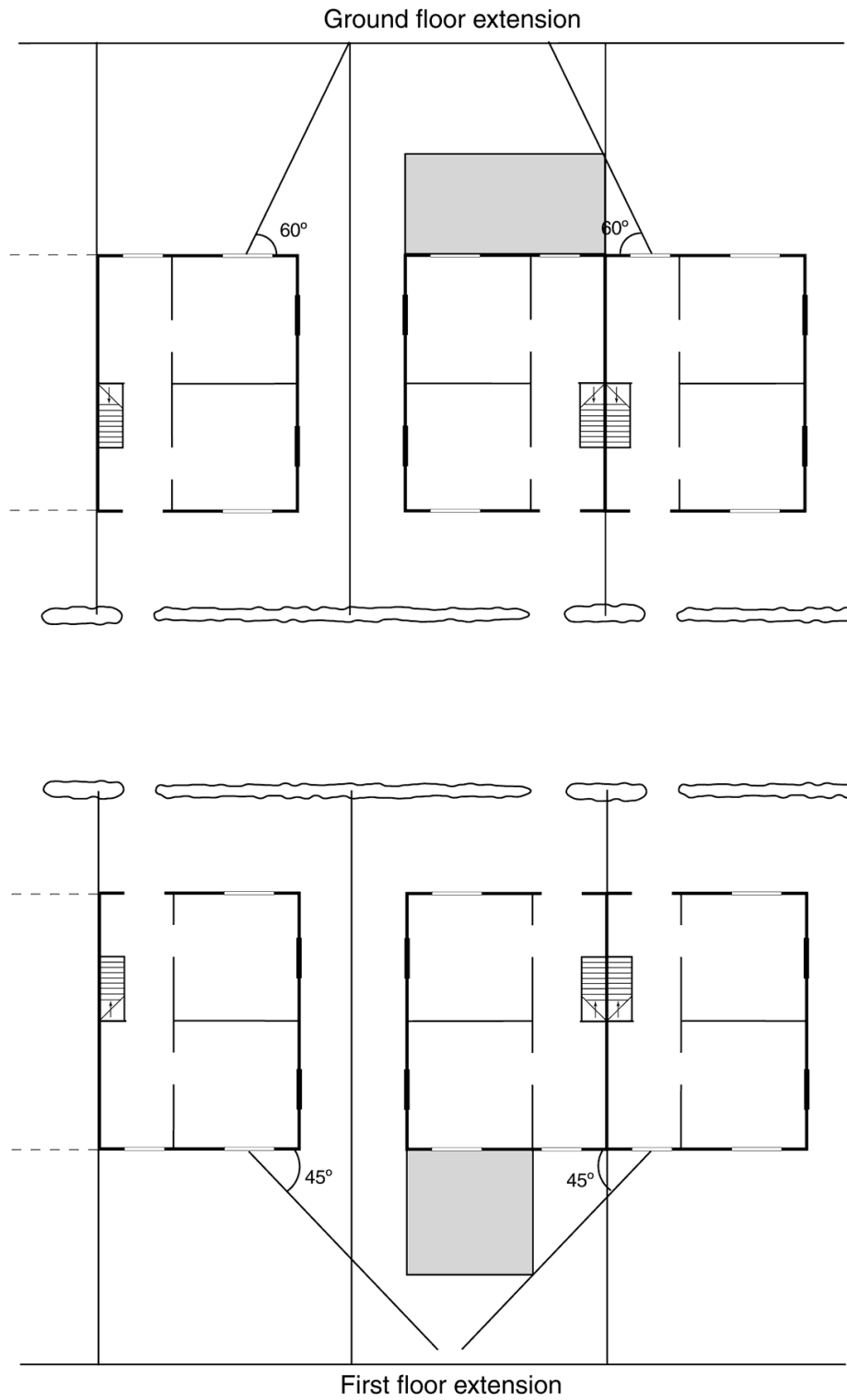
5. The Effect on Neighbours

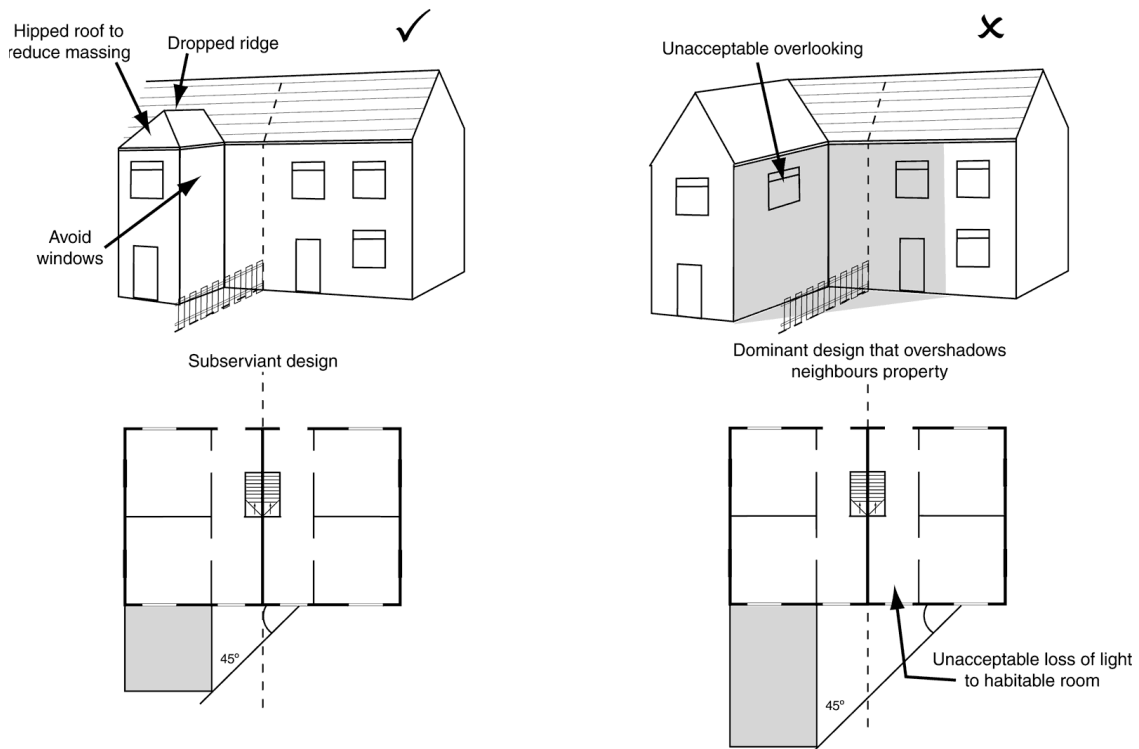
When designing an extension the effect on the living conditions of neighbours is a prime consideration. Good neighbourliness is an established principle of national planning and matters such as loss of light, outlook and noise are relevant. Points to consider are:

- **Daylight, sunlight and overshadowing**

Extensions that overshadow a neighbour's property, depriving areas of sunlight, should be avoided. This is especially important if the extension is to the south of the neighbouring property. The amount of overshadowing will depend on the plan area and the height of the extension, its orientation and variations in ground level.

As a guideline, a single-storey extension should not project beyond a line drawn at 60 degrees from the middle of the nearest ground floor window of a habitable room of adjacent property. Habitable rooms include kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms but exclude bathrooms, toilets, halls, landings and store rooms. First floor and two-storey extensions should not generally project beyond a line taken at 45 degrees from the middle of ground floor windows of habitable rooms. The Building Research Establishment report "Site Layout and Planning for Daylight and Sunlight" 1991 is a useful reference on these issues.





In order to avoid loss of light to neighbours it may be necessary to keep the extension away from boundaries. This is particularly important for two storey extensions. Leaving space between the extension and the boundary will also allow for easier maintenance.

TIP

Building Regulations set minimum standards in respect of daylight and ventilation of rooms and any extension will need to conform to these. Advice can be obtained from the Council's Building Control Service.

- **Privacy/Overlooking**

Proposals for residential extensions will only be permitted where there is no material harm to a neighbour's privacy and outlook. Windows that directly overlook a nearby neighbouring dwelling should be avoided. As a 'rule of thumb' a minimum distance of 21 metres is required between directly facing windows. Reasonable privacy may sometimes be secured through careful design rather than reliance on physical separation only.

- **Site characteristics**

Any variance of ground levels, particularly in relation to neighbouring properties, will need to be considered. Attractive walls or fences and existing trees, shrubs or hedges should be retained as far as possible. Some trees are protected by Tree Preservation Orders, and trees within conservation areas are subject to similar protection. Trees should not be pruned, felled, deliberately damaged or uprooted without checking whether they are protected and whether separate consent is required for their removal. Advice should be sought before building close to trees; proposals that may damage or

affect protected trees may be refused. For further information and advice on trees, contact the Council's Tree Officer, in the Countryside and Environment Service.

6. Car Parking Provision and Road Safety

Building an extension can affect the car parking arrangements for the dwelling. A house extension might reduce the available parking space, affect manoeuvring space for vehicles or lead to an alteration to existing access arrangements from the highway. The Council will need to be satisfied that road safety would not be adversely affected in the vicinity of the development.

Parking areas and drives should be designed to avoid headlight glare into rooms of the property or neighbouring dwellings and minimise the impact of noise, fumes and loss of privacy. Careful consideration should be given to the choice of surface materials for parking areas and access drives. Sufficient space should be allowed for pedestrian access to entrances in the building. Doors opening directly onto access drives should be avoided.

The impact of garages, particularly double garages, can be dominant and unsympathetic unless carefully designed. Garages should generally have roofs to match the pitch of the house, and the effect minimised by ensuring that the eaves are as low as possible. Garages should normally be located to the side or rear of dwellings and be set back from the highway to allow access or parking between the garage and the pavement. Where they project forward of the main entrance to a house, care should be taken to ensure that they do not dominate the main elevation.

7. Private Outdoor Space

Gardens are an important feature of most homes. Garden size will be affected by the house extension, or the introduction of a garage and turning area. Gardens of a certain size may be an important part of the character of an area and the Council will normally seek to ensure that reasonable garden sizes, appropriate to the size of house, are maintained. Supplementary Planning Guidance No. 4 "Private Open space for New Residential Development" identifies standards to be taken into account when considering applications for house extensions, although it should be noted that this document is now quite dated and that the guidance in Planning Policy Guidance 3 needs also to be taken into account.

8. Granny Annexes or Accommodation for Elderly or Disabled Relatives

An extension forming an annexe or ancillary accommodation, for example for an elderly relative, should be of comparatively modest size, and integrated in design with the main house. It should be linked internally to the main dwelling, but may have a separate entrance. The accommodation should be designed in such a manner as to easily enable the annexe to be later used as an integral part of the main dwelling. A large

granny annexe capable of being made into a separate dwelling will not normally be acceptable.

If the extension is required for a disabled member of the family, there may be special requirements to consider and exceptions to the normal rules for extensions may be appropriate. The construction of a house extension can improve access to an older property if it is designed to meet the space standards for new houses. Where possible an internal step should be avoided and new doors provided with a level threshold not raised above ground level. Advice about designs that can accommodate disabled people can be obtained from the design guidance 'Designing for Accessibility in Berkshire' which is available on the Council's website at www.westberks.gov.uk. The guide can be located on the Building Control Access for Disabled page.

9. Historic Areas and Buildings

Special considerations apply to listed buildings and buildings located within a conservation area. It is normally undesirable to alter a historic building of special interest, whether by adding an extension or otherwise. Where it is acceptable, extending a historic building requires great skill and care as it is important to preserve the original fabric and retain features that possess architectural or historic interest. It will be necessary to obtain the services of specialists in this field. Any development proposal in a conservation area will be judged on its effect on the area's character and appearance.

10. Protected Species

Prior to any development (including demolition or alteration of buildings), appropriate steps should be taken to check for the likely presence of any species protected by law, for example by consulting the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre. Protected species include badgers, great crested newts, dormice, water voles, barn owls and all species of bat. The presence of a protected species is a material consideration in the planning process and must be disclosed to the planning authority. If the presence of a protected species is suspected, the applicant must arrange for a suitably qualified consultant to undertake a survey, which should be submitted with the planning application. Where a survey is not submitted, the planning authority may request one if it considers that protected species may be an issue (e.g. a bat survey will usually be required for any application involving the alteration of a wood framed barn). This may delay consideration of the application until the survey has been submitted. If protected species are found, then the consultant can advise about whether the development should proceed, whether the development can be re-designed to safeguard the species and/or whether suitable mitigation can be designed. They can also liaise with the planning authority over this issue. A list of environmental consultants can be found on the website of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management at www.ieem.org.uk. Further advice can be obtained from the Council's ecologist or English Nature. In some situations where development affects European Protected species, then in addition to planning permission, a licence will be required.

11. Planning Policies

The government's policy for design in the planning system is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note1 General Policies and Principles. Policy EN1 and LD3 of the adopted Berkshire Structure Plan 1991-2006 and OVS.2 of the West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006 cover general design issues including compliance with highway standards. Policies ENV.32 and ENV.33 of the Local Plan relate to development affecting listed buildings or conservation areas, policy ENV24 applies to extensions to dwellings in the countryside and Policy ENV.9A to protection of wildlife species. These documents are available to view in the Council Offices and online at www.westberks.gov.uk.

References

Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 General Policies and Principles. Available to view at www.odpm.gov.uk/

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 Housing. Available to view at www.odpm.gov.uk/

Planning- A Guide for Householders. Available free from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or view online at www.odpm.gov.uk/

Berkshire Structure Plan 1991 – 2006. Available to view at Council Offices and libraries.

West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991 – 2006. Adopted June 2002. Available to view at Council Offices and libraries and online at www.westberks.gov.uk

Supplementary Planning Guidance and Village Design Statements available to view at Council Offices and online at www.westberks.gov.uk

Building and Research Establishment (1991) Site Layout and Planning for Daylight and Sunlight.

For Further Advice

If you would like further advice or application forms, please write to or telephone the Planning Control Section of the Planning and Transport Strategy Service. Our address is:

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