



A GUIDE TO PLANNING PERMISSION

THE PROCESS EXPLAINED AND THE RISKS REVEALED
BY AWARD-WINNING ARCHITECT JOHN DYER GRIMES



John Dyer Grimes – age 2

ARCHITECTURE IS IN MY BLOOD

My father was a celebrated architect, and I followed in his footsteps around construction sites as a child until working in his studio as a man. I started in the days of pen and tracing paper and learned practical experience laying bricks and digging holes on site. At 24, I opened my own practice, and 18 years later I have the great pleasure of leading a world-class team at Dyer Grimes Architects.

From our Putney practice on the banks of the Thames, we produce creative, practical designs to transform ordinary places into amazing spaces. Everyone in our team of ten has their own specialist skills, united in a design ethos dedicated to delivering beautiful homes. We keep our scale small, intimate and personal so we can provide the best possible client experience. It's not about ego, it's not about showing off. It's about listening to the client and building everything around their dreams and aspirations.

In my lifetime I've seen my discipline transform as new technologies, materials and methods help us create better, more beautiful, more sustainable homes. I'm learning every day, but I feel it's time to start sharing the knowledge I've built up over my career. There are certain questions and concerns that have kept popping up over the hundreds of projects we have completed, so I have prepared this guide as a convenient and comprehensive means of answering those queries.

I hope this guide helps you to take your first step in creating a space fitted perfectly around you.

John Dyer Grimes
Managing Director, Dyer Grimes Architects

If you're considering property development, you'll no doubt have heard some horror stories about planning permission. Whether from friends, experts or online forums, we've all heard of failed applications and costly appeal processes, abandoned plans and wasted money.

Every stage of an architectural project is risky. If you're an entirely risk averse person, property development simply isn't for you. Planning applications can fail and it's you that will have to pay the price. But as with any risky investment, by understanding the process, seeking the right advice and exercising extreme caution you can enjoy tremendous, life-changing rewards.

At Dyer Grimes Architecture, we're proud to have a 99% success rate for planning permissions. That's not from playing it safe either; we always push our clients' dreams as far as we can and argue their case exhaustively to minimise compromise.

This guide is your first step to reducing the risk of a failed application. It will take you through the entire process, the risks particular to each type of development and the level of service you should demand from your architect.

WHAT IS PLANNING PERMISSION?

In the end, planning permission is no more than a couple of sheets of A4 paper. On those pages are the council's written approval for works to be carried out on the given site in accordance with the submitted drawings within three years.

So much depends upon those little pieces of paper. Finally receiving them is a relief after what can be weeks, months or even years of preparation, negotiation and uncertainty. The attempt to receive planning permission can either be the first step in realising your architectural dreams or a painful end to your journey.

Careful navigation of hundreds of building regulations is required to reach your goal of planning permission. There are national, regional and site specific requirements and missing just one can be the difference between sailing through or having to start over – if you can afford to.

WHY IT IS NEEDED

We can't deny the occasional daydream about an architectural wonderland where we're free to untether our imaginations and build whatever we want. But, sadly, the reality would be a disaster. Planning permission exists to ensure that all building works carried out are not detrimental to the aesthetic, people and environment of the surrounding area.

It's thanks to planning permission that the UK is able to preserve the character of areas with centuries of architectural heritage and true local character. It also allows us to live without fear that our home could end up in the shadow of a neighbour's development, or worse, damaged by it.

Nowadays, planning permission covers far more than just local concerns. Climate change necessitates sustainable buildings with efficient running costs, while our modern understanding of the delicateness of nature demands minimal ecological impact.

It may sound like too much red tape but as long as you are cognizant of the requirements and conscientious to your surroundings the most incredible projects can be green lit with minimal compromise.

WHO IS INVOLVED

At the top is you, and it's important not to forget that. Regardless of how many experts you hire to help you and how qualified they may be, responsibility for the planning process and indeed the entire build lies with the owner of the land and/or the property. That includes any fees for the submission or appeals and any penalties for not complying with the planning permission, on top of the costs for hiring all the relevant parties.

That's why your first port of call should be an architect – one equipped with knowledge of local regulations, a bulging book of contacts and experience in the type of development you're pursuing. They'll be able to take the helm for the planning process, ensuring every box is ticked.

You need to be judicious in your selection. Your architect will be tasked with assembling upwards of ten or more specialists who will provide advice and tests to check their designs are compliant with regulations.

For example, a project in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea could require over 30 tests, assessments and surveys. These range from acoustic and air quality testing to tree surveys, basement impact and even archaeological assessments. If any one of these isn't conducted thoroughly it could hinder or doom your planning application.

At the other end is the planning department of your local council. The planning officers there will consider your application based on its supporting evidence and local building regulations or any other constraints, such as conservation area or listed status.

Your neighbours may also become involved. If enough object to your plans, the application will progress to a Planning Committee. Another potential party are independent inspectors called upon if a failed application goes to appeal, or a panel of architects if a Design Review Panel is required.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO CONSIDER BEFORE STARTING THE PLANNING PROCESS?

No two planning applications are the same. Every application is considered on its own merit and even two seemingly identical plans can reach wildly different outcomes.

Because the challenges facing each build are so unique, it would be overwhelming to list every possible policy affecting the success of a planning application. Even if your street is riddled with new developments, there's no guarantee yours will be successful as well. Nevertheless, we've compiled the five major factors that will determine the relative difficulty of gaining approval for your project.

1. LOCATION

Every region, county and borough has specific building regulations, planning constraints and development targets. The first step to a successful application is a thorough understanding of the rules you will be working under and the types of project likely to be favoured or opposed by local authorities.

For example, basement developments in Kensington and Chelsea require exhaustive testing due to concerns over structural damage to neighbouring properties and impact to the water table.

If the site location is within a Conservation Area there will be an additional layer of constraints to work within, designated by the local council in order to protect the character



John Dyer Grimes – Period Architecture – Hemingford Road

of an area. Significant alterations to the streetscape or trees will be particularly challenging if not impossible to have approved.

Another locational challenge emerges if the site is within or bordering a Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land. Both require authorisation from beyond the local council, such as the Mayor of London or the Secretary of State, for planning permission to be granted.

In Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the visibility of your build in the landscape will need to be minimised or blended into the environment.

2. SITE

The site itself will have many characteristics that may make or break your planning application. Greenfield sites, where there has been no history of development, are amongst the hardest to gain permission for. Councils much prefer using land that has been built on prior, especially brownfield sites where the land is ex-industrial and fallen into disuse. Remember, planning officers are looking for developments that are a tangible improvement to their borough.

The next challenge is the existing usage category of the site. Councils will have certain policies against loss of accommodation or employment and if your plans negatively impact them it may be grounds for a refusal.

For example, if you're converting flats into a single family home, planning officers could object to the reduction in available housing. Or, if you're converting a commercial premises into domestic, they could object to the loss of employment.

If you're truly determined, you may be able to be granted permission despite this if you can offset any negative impacts with developments elsewhere – with the downside of ballooning costs.

There may be other aspects of the land itself that require extra care during planning, such as if it's located in a flood zone, making excavation works more difficult and possibly requiring the installation of flood defences.

3. DEVELOPMENT

A rough idea of your planning success can be determined with the type of development you wish to pursue.

Renovation

While any type of development can meet resistance, the easiest to pass is generally an interior renovation. A large amount of planning is concerned with exterior appearance and impact on surrounding area, which interior work avoids.

What you will still have to pay attention to are any sustainability and energy efficiency regulations required by the council. For older properties in particular, they may require you to make improvements to the insulation or building services along with any structural changes.

Remember that planning departments exist to maintain or improve the housing stock. This may be the fundamental purpose of a renovation, but what you consider an improvement and what the council does may not always line up.

Exterior renovations will face more difficulties, especially if they have listed status and/or are in a conservation area. Any changes to the appearance to the property will have to be sympathetic to the original structure in material and design, or in certain cases, clearly differentiate itself from period architecture but in a style that is attractive and unobtrusive.

Even outside of conservation areas, exterior renovations still need to be considered an improvement to the appearance of the property.

CASE STUDY – RENOVATING THREE HOMES INTO ONE

Our clients in Emperor's Gate, South Kensington found a rare opportunity to spread out without uprooting. When the floors above and below their ground floor period mansion flat both went for sale, they jumped at the chance to triple their space with a united, bespoke family home.

Transforming three full featured homes into one is no small task, especially in a six storey Victorian town house with over a hundred years of disparate alterations. Period renovations are a delicate balance of which aspects of the building were essential to its character and which needed to be stripped out to meet our clients' aspirations.

Our vision re-imagined each floor for a single use: a master bedroom at the top, a living space in the middle and a designer kitchen in the basement opening out into the surrounding courtyard.

Going from one floor to three let our clients have an open plan living space and kitchen while still having bedrooms for their children and guests. Meanwhile,

their own bedroom comes complete with an en suite bathroom, dressing room and a balcony overlooking the leafy gardens below.

The once overcrowded basement benefited most. The new kitchen opens directly into the courtyard through Crittal doors, through which light reflects off the polished concrete floor. This contrasts to beautiful effect with the rough texture of exposed brickwork and a charcoal grey stone kitchen island with visible fossils.

To bring all three floors together, we collaborated with artisans in the Netherlands for a Bauhaus inspired staircase, with a slender metal handrail and balusters – strikingly modern while blending with the Victorian aesthetic.

Once the dust had settled, our clients found a unique family dwelling combining contemporary design with period grace. Opening up every floor with light and space created true town house elegance, while one-off pieces from around the world added inimitable character.

Extensions

Planning applications become more complex the more your extension expands from the original building. While not as stringent as new builds, extensions are still expected to be of a certain standard for sustainability and efficiency, and some councils will demand improvements to the rest of the structure as well.

For garden extensions, you have to consider what trees need to be removed, which requires specialist assessment of whether they are protected species or are of ecological importance. Also, the extension must not dominate the house itself or impact the availability of light for neighbouring properties. Even rear extensions may have to abide by certain design archetypes in conservation areas, such as roof slope, materials or colour.

CASE STUDY – DOUBLE EXTENSION TO PERIOD PROPERTY

Mark loved two things: contemporary architecture and his mother. In the process of transforming the interior of his home from classic Victorian to ultra contemporary he also wanted to provide his mother with her own space to enjoy independence while still being close to the family.

In effect, we needed to turn one home into two. Inevitably, this required a significant increase in floor space through both a rear and a side extension, as well as reconfiguring of the loft space to provide additional bedrooms.

For the side extension, we matched the original brick and design so that – after a bit of weathering – the new space will look as if it was always a part of the existing structure.

This side extension would provide Mark's mother with her own bedroom, bathroom, living room and kitchen as well as her own access to the street

and the garden. The second floor of the extension would house another bedroom complete with en suite.

For the rear extension we went in the opposite direction: glass walls and metal frames housing a brand new kitchen opening directly to the garden. Adding modern elements to a period property requires strict attention to detail so that despite the juxtaposition in design, quality is matched across both.

Planning departments often insist on clear differentiation between old and new for rear extensions, with generous glass to provide transparency that minimises disruption of the original aesthetic. At first, the planning department disapproved but when we placed our proposal alongside theirs, it was undeniable which most satisfied the needs for Mark's family. Now old and new, young and old are united in one state of the art period conversion.



John Dyer Grimes – Contemporary Architecture – Park Fields

Basement extensions are very popular in modern development. Plans to excavate under a property need to have accompanying evidence that the structural integrity of the property or surrounding properties is not damaged, along with impact on the water table, especially in flood zones.

In dense areas such as Kensington and Chelsea, councils are hesitant to approve basement developments and many listed buildings forbid them altogether.

For roof extensions, the primary concern is typically whether the streetscape is impacted by alterations that interrupt the continuity established in neighbouring roofs or break the silhouette by projecting above the typical roof level.

A complication you likely would never expect is bats. As they're a protected species, if they're found to be roosting in your roof you won't be able to carry out works while they're occupying it, and even when you are able to, you will have to provide replacement nests such as bat boxes.

New builds

Building regulations are most onerous for new builds, especially in regards to energy efficiency and sustainability. Planning applications for new builds must include exhaustive supporting documents proving the designs are compliant with building regulations.

Planning departments will be looking for builds that are considered improvements to the housing stock. A high quality, attractive and efficient design is the first priority for any new build to be successful.

Some councils, especially London boroughs, have additional demands above national regulations, such as hitting at least level 3 or 4 in the Code for Sustainable Homes, raising to 5 or 6 (essentially zero carbon) in Green Belt areas.

Waste facilities, off-road parking space and police-assessed secure design are often requirements, as well as a layout that is or can easily be converted to accommodate to the needs of the elderly or impaired with ground floor bathrooms and potential for lift access.

Like in extensions, ecological impact, tree removal and bat inhabitation will all have to be assessed. Certain Code for Sustainable Homes levels require a new build not only to limit ecological impact, but also to make ecological enhancements to the area.

New builds will also often be required to use similar materials or be of a similar design as surrounding structures, or display such high quality that they are considered a benefit to the appearance of the neighbourhood. New builds in conservation areas are one of the most challenging developments to have approved.

Additionally, if a new build requires the demolition of an existing structure, the applicant must receive special permission from the council. This involves stating a case for why the replacement structure would be a worthwhile improvement – far easier if the existing building is of poor quality or is in a state of decay.

Some councils also require you to make affordable housing contributions if your build involves any demolition work – often running into tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds.

CASE STUDY – BRAND NEW BUILD IN A CONSERVATION AREA

Pamela always dreamed of giving her family the perfect home but she was stuck with a bungalow that felt increasingly cramped and restrictive. She didn't want to leave the street she knew and loved but there was problem: this street was in the strict West Wimbledon Conservation area.

Pamela's tastes made it even more difficult. She wanted an ultra contemporary home that would stand the test of time well into her grandchildren's lives. It would be unlike anything seen in the area and would require total demolition of the existing structure.

Luckily, the bungalow wasn't considered to have architectural merit, so demolition wasn't too contentious. However, we still couldn't expand much beyond the existing building footprint or roof line. So how did we end up with a floor area of over 430 square metres?

The solution was to extend downwards with an expansive basement floor complete with lightwells to make it feel as open and organic as the surface floors. This allowed us to equip the

house with a cinema, gym, sauna, bathroom and en suite bedroom without visibly increasing its size.

Thanks to the awkward shape of the original bungalow, we only slightly protruded above the original roofline as well. Quality of the space was as important as the quantity, with open plan, light-filled rooms that felt even larger than their already generous floor space.

Planning departments are as concerned with performance as appearance, so designing a home that achieved Level 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes provided a significant advantage. Combined with its elegant, sculptural appearance, the planners agreed that Pamela's home was an exception worth approving.

Permission was hard won and its success was controversial amongst locals and officials alike. Though some toes were trodden on, approval was gained through patient negotiation, respect for the streetscape and pursuit of the highest possible quality in materials and design.

4. NEIGHBOURS

One of the core purposes of planning departments is to ensure building works do not negatively impact the quality of life for surrounding residents.

While neighbour objections can be unpredictable, there are measurable criteria to gauge impact to neighbour amenity, especially in regards to available light.

The Right to Light states that if a window has been in place for 60 years or more that the amount of illumination it provides cannot be reduced. It's the reason you can't have extensions towering over your neighbour's house, but even modest developments may have their planning approval denied or have to pay damages if the plans fail to take the sun into account.

For attached houses and terraces, development must not undermine the structural integrity of the adjoining dwellings and/or its building services. The plans will also have to include information on the measures that will be taken during development to minimise disruption to surrounding lives and businesses.

Neighbour objections are a common hindrance to the planning process, which we cover in more detail in the *How Do You Handle Neighbours?* section on page 18. Informing those who will be affected as early as possible and generally being conscientious is the best way of minimising risk from neighbour disputes.

5. STATUS

The strictest constraints come into effect if a building has listed status. Listed buildings are recorded by English Heritage as important or exceptional in some way, whether locally, nationally, internationally or historically.

Any building dating from before 1700 and most before 1840 that survive in anything like their original condition are granted listed status, covering a large swathe of London's most desirable housing stock.

A common mistake is to believe that only the exterior of a listed house is protected, but listed status in fact includes the entirety of the structure.

Listed status does not preclude all development, but it does require an extra level of care, attention and respect to the original property in order to persuade planning officers.

A step below listed status is a Building of Townscape Merit (BTM), an additional layer of scrutiny applied to buildings which are considered to be particularly integral to the local character or possess historical significance.

Unlike listed buildings, BTM status is not concerned with the interior of a property and does not carry the same level of legal protection. However, councils will still try to protect them as much as possible, and will ask any modifications to be sympathetic to the original appearance.

Whether listed or BTM, permission to work on buildings with protected status is typically only granted to esteemed architects that the council can trust to carry out high quality, respectful developments.

WHAT IS THE PLANNING APPLICATION PROCESS?

Planning applications are lengthy, involved processes that can take anywhere from weeks to years to reach a conclusion. In relatively simple developments where every stage progresses smoothly you could be able to start building work within a couple of months, but neighbour objections, listed status negotiations and appeals can stretch that date far out of reach.

Understanding the process, where you may be tripped up and how long each stage takes is essential to realistically assessing the risk of your application and the investment in time you will need to make.

PRE-APPLICATION

It's recommended that you apply for pre-application before your final submission. This gives you the opportunity to meet a planning officer and test the waters with your proposals.

The planning officer will give a full break down of the regulations for your site, a checklist of required documents for your application and provide a general idea of the likelihood that you will be granted permission.

Pre-applications aren't free and it can take from four to eight weeks to get a slot, but they dramatically reduce the risk of a failed first attempt, especially for more complex builds.



John Dyer Grimes – Contemporary Architecture – White Lodge

It's also worth bearing in mind that planning applications are publicly viewable, while pre-applications are confidential. This makes them a valuable way of seeing how far you can push the boundaries without damaging public perception of your development.

This should also be the stage that you consult your neighbours to clear any of their concerns before submitting your final application. More detail on how to handle neighbours can be found in the *How Do You Handle Neighbours?* section on page 18.

APPLICATION

Once you're sure of the development you want to pursue, your architect will assemble the planning application and all necessary supporting documents and evidence. Hopefully, you have a relationship with your architect that has allowed you to fulfil your goals while still having a high chance of success.

The fee for the actual application is quite low. It's the number of specialists required to produce all supporting documents that make the planning process expensive, and depending on the area you'll be needing to hire between five to ten or even more. Ensure your architect can verify the quality of each one: it takes just a single fudged document to undo the entire application.

While it can be disheartening to see costs add up before a single brick is laid, it's better to be thorough at this stage than risk having to go through the entire process again. If your architect is upfront about all costs and why they're required, you should have no surprise dents to your budget.

Once all forms are filled out, double checked and bundled with the required documents, the application is sent to the local planning department. The planning officers will check all requirements are met and request any missing documents.

If your architect has good rapport and reputation with the local council, they may receive advice for minor changes that need to be made in order to give the application a better chance, saving the hassle and costs of appeals and resubmissions.

Your planning application is then publicised and will be considered by the planning officer within eight weeks.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

If the number of public objections to your planning application go above the threshold for your area, the application will be automatically put forward to a Planning Committee.

Planning Committees provide the public with an opportunity to air their grievances while the architect can provide additional evidence to why their concerns are unfounded or not significant enough to deny development.

The result of a Planning Committee may be that the application is approved, but with certain conditions added to satisfy neighbour concerns. If you and your architect consider those conditions appropriate you can start development, if not, you can appeal to the Secretary of State to have them relaxed or removed.

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

In rare cases, the local council may feel the need to bring in a panel of experienced architects to provide their verdict on a development. This usually occurs for the most ambitious designs that the council does not feel sufficiently informed to assess, or when the local community or special interest groups object to a build.

The architect for your project will be asked to present their case to the Design Review Panel to justify their plans and their approach to the challenges of the design and development. The discussion is highly technical and every aspect will come under close scrutiny.

It's essential that your architect is confident in explaining their work – the esteemed architects on a Design Review Panel will easily sniff out a novice.

Once the panel closes, the architects will advise the council on whether the development has sufficient grounds to be approved.

APPEAL

If you have received a formal letter of refusal or the planning department has failed to respond within the allotted time, you are entitled to use the appeals process.

Depending on the nature of your application, there are three possible methods of appeal:

1. Written Representations

This involves submitting the application along with any supporting information to an independent inspector from the Planning Inspectorate. The local council will also submit their relevant documentation and grounds for refusal.

The inspector will then conduct a site visit to provide an impartial verdict on each party's claims based on the evidence provided and their own assessment.

2. Hearing

This is a meeting between your architect, the local authority and an independent inspector from the Planning Inspectorate to discuss the case in detail. The inspector will then deliver their verdict based upon the arguments made during the hearing.

3. Public Inquiry

Reserved for major applications and rarely required for residential development, public inquiries are expensive, time consuming legal proceedings where there is significant public feeling towards a development. Legal representation is likely required in addition to your architect.

Whatever process applies to your development, it's essential that your architect has proven experience in being successful in planning application appeals. Any appeal requires an additional level of involvement and investment from your architect, and they need to be well prepared for the scrutiny that their work will come under.

SECOND ATTEMPT

Should your appeal fail, or if you felt there was no use appealing in the first place, the final option is to go back to the drawing board.

By this stage, you and your architect should be intimately aware of what changes have to be made in order for the application to be successful in a second attempt. Unfortunately, the more you have to change in the plans, the more specialists you will have to rehire to conduct tests on the new designs.

You may feel at this stage that the planning refusal was the fault of the architect rather than your brief. In this situation, it's worth seeking second opinions from other architects on your original planning application and switching over should you be more confident in their ability.

At DGA, we've inherited many projects that failed their initial planning application. Often, it's the quality and detail of the application and supporting documents that is at fault rather than the design, or the design may feature easily correctable flaws.

Hiring the wrong architect is often a painful waste of time and money, but by learning from your mistakes and staying optimistic about your goals your second attempt will put you back on track.

HOW DO YOU HANDLE NEIGHBOURS?

It's almost impossible to build so far from anyone else that you won't have to think about the impact your development will have on others. Informing and involving neighbours is essential to a successful application and, just as importantly, it is common courtesy. Neighbours are so integral to planning applications, we've dedicated this entire section to them.

A certain amount of neighbour objections (the exact number depends on the area) will automatically require a Planning Committee to look over the proposed project. Neighbours will be able to present their case against their build, while your architect argues for its approval. But in the vast majority of cases, the unwanted extra time and costs of a Planning Committee are avoidable. Neighbour objections should never come as a surprise; you should already be well aware of the surrounding opinion of your plans before even submitting an application.

For modest developments – and if you get along with your neighbours – going door to door and letting people know what you want to build and when may be enough. For anything else, you should ask your architect to brief your neighbours (assuming they're experienced in doing so).

The fact is, no one wants to live next to a building site. Combine this with people's natural disinclination towards change – especially in conservation areas – and worried neighbours become an inevitability.

Negative opinion is likely to spread if it goes unchecked. Before you know it, residents who would barely be affected are joining concern groups and resistance towards your build entrenches.

It takes a patient, sympathetic and experienced architect to stop neighbours from assuming the worst. Most people can't read architectural drawings, don't understand the care that goes into a development and would simply rather not be disturbed.

Here's some of our tried and true approaches to swaying neighbour opinion:

1. INVOLVE THEM EARLY

Once your planning application is submitted it will be publicly visible on your local council's website. This is the last way you want your neighbours to discover your plans, and the most likely cause for a knee jerk objection.

The earlier neighbours are consulted, the better. Show that they're involved, that they're part of the process and their feedback is important. Some amount of investment on their part will make them far happier, even helpful, with your development.

2. ARRANGE A MEETING

It's often easier to change the opinion of a group than an individual. If your architect presents the plans person to person in isolation, some may be swayed while others remain resistant. But if all neighbours are in one place, everyone's concerns can be addressed at once and the likelihood of outlier opinion is reduced.

Simply put, minority resistance is less likely to manifest into action if they see the majority is happy. As long as the trend of opinion is positive, you're unlikely to meet objections when you submit your plans.

3. EXPLAIN CLEARLY

It's hard to convince someone using materials they don't understand. Technical drawings and spreadsheets aren't going to win hearts and minds.

Luckily, 3D modelling and image manipulation programs make it easy to give a clear idea of what a finished development will look like. We can then explain the measures we've taken to minimise impact and remove the image in their minds of a monstrous eyesore ruining their street or garden.

4. PRESENT BENEFITS

You'll have a tough time swaying opinion if you only talk about how your build benefits you. No matter how much it may improve your quality of life, neighbours are going to care far more about how it impacts them.

It's important to emphasise the knock on effect of a successful planning application. While some may want to keep their area entirely untouched, most people want to be able to

improve their property one day, whether for practical reasons or to increase value. This is far easier if there is a precedent for successful planning applications in the area.

Increasing the value of one property also increases the value of those surrounding it. Potential buyers are enticed by areas that show active development, and with London's limited housing stock, expansion is essential.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR ARCHITECT?

EXPERTISE

The architect you choose must have intimate knowledge of the area you want build in and the type of development you plan to pursue. The more detail they have on local policies and what has or has not passed the process, the more likely they are to submit a successful application.

Most architects will be happy to share examples of their work, so don't be shy to ask. Look for projects that tackled similar problems that you are likely to face, especially if they're in the same area. Officially, precedent shouldn't influence a decision but in reality it's a significant factor.

COMMUNICATION

Risks inherent in the process and particular to your project need to be explained exhaustively. You should leave your consultation with a clear idea of the likelihood your application will be successful and the costs if it isn't.

You should also feel a rapport with your architect, that you're able to speak freely with them about what you want and be involved in the process. Property development is one area you definitely don't want any misunderstandings.

TRACK RECORD

Every project is unique and there are no guarantees, but you should still ask your architect for their success rate, as it's a strong indicator of their quality. You should be looking for results of 90% or above for first time applications and around 99% overall.

While a high first time success rate is reassuring, also check that they have experience in second attempts and the appeals process. If you aren't successful initially, you don't want to be stuck with an architect who isn't confident in pursuing it further.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

If you have a taste for paperwork (if not, you should develop one), then ask to see some example planning documents. While you may not fully understand their contents, take a close look at how they are laid out and designed. Even a novice will be able to make sense of a well constructed application.

Clarity of information is essential. Planning officers often only have a couple of hours to look over the documents. If you find the application dense, unwieldy and confusing, there's a good chance the people deciding the fate of your build will as well.

REPUTATION

Ideally, they will also have strong relationships with planning officers in your area. This will make any negotiations go far smoother, as councils prefer granting planning permission to architects they trust to do a high quality, compliant job.

Reputation also makes it more likely that planning officers will contact the architect directly if there are any issues with the application, allowing them to make minor alterations without resubmitting.

COMPATIBLE ATTITUDE TO RISK

In the end, your architect needs to be someone you feel can interpret and realise your dreams without exposing you to unnecessary risk. Demand nothing less than complete transparency at every stage – after all, you're the one footing the bill.

The appropriate level of risk can be hard to assess. Some architects may heavily compromise your vision in exchange for an easy pass, while others will be willing to push your goals as far as possible. If you're not comfortable with the projected end result, seek a second opinion.

THE DYER GRIMES DIFFERENCE

We're an award winning architectural practice who have proven our skill and dedication on over 200 homes. Most recently we were honoured to receive the Best Family Home Award from the Sunday Times British Homes Awards 2013. As gratifying as it is to be officially recognised, we thrive on the pleasure of turning a client's dream into reality, and we approach every project with the same attention, care and high standards of craftsmanship. It's not about ego, it's not about showing off. It's about listening to the client and building everything around their dreams and aspirations.

Through such experience we recommend only the highest quality and most reliable contractors, and our local knowledge means we have contacts in council planning offices, estate agents, local suppliers and builders. With our own interior design and planning teams, you get the full package built from the inside out.

Your project will be overseen by our specialist project managers who possess exacting attention to detail and vast experience managing and liaising with builders. They'll ensure your house is delivered on time, on budget and at the standards which will meet or exceed your expectations. Along with project managers we can recommend a vast array of trusted specialists, from structural and service engineers to CAD checks and party wall surveyors.

Our projects are guided by a three step plan we call CONCEPT, PLAN, BUILD.

1 CONCEPT

So you've had this brilliant idea which you've gone over and over in your head until it aches. But will it work and what's it going to cost? Rather than plunging headlong into the more costly stages of getting detailed plans drawn up, why not get your idea road tested by our team of architectural designers here in London?

Based on your ideas, we'll sketch out some initial design concepts and tell you what's involved to take it to the next stage and fulfil your dream. This service is stage one of the journey and can be provided in isolation or as part of a full "clicks to bricks" service.

2 PLAN

To take your idea to the critical planning phase, we develop more detailed design concepts and scale plans, together with full design and build budget estimates. Our team of in-house experts in our offices in London are able to provide clients with an accurate 3D 'walk through' of their new home to help them make those last minute, but crucial, design decisions.

Detailed planning application documents are developed, using our extensive experience and negotiating power with local councils to ensure the process runs as smoothly and quickly as possible. Our 90 per cent success rate in client planning approvals across London and Surrey reflects our skill and determination in this field.

3 BUILD

Once a project has the go ahead of planners and clients, we will provide detailed technical plans which meet all legal obligations and allow for accurate construction costs to be submitted. We will obtain fixed prices from selected contractors and organise contracts on behalf of clients.

Whilst some of our clients choose to manage the construction of works themselves, many have opted to use us to co-ordinate every aspect of the build, from managing builders and consultants, to monitoring the progress of building works through to successful delivery. We have a great track record in keeping projects on course and on budget with an unfaltering attention to quality and detail.

“We found John to be a true professional.

He listened and took on board exactly what we were looking to create and worked very closely with us. We found him to be highly motivated, very communicative, flexible and very easy to deal with. He assembled a great team around him and delivered on everything.

I cannot recommend him highly enough.”

Tony Maude, White Lodge client

Winner of Sunday Times and Design Et Al
Best Family Home Award 2013

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