

What can householders build without planning permission in England?

Many common home improvements — from rear extensions and loft conversions to sheds and porches — can be carried out in England without a planning application under 'permitted development' rights. Understanding the rules, limits and exceptions helps you plan your project with confidence.

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KEY FACTS

Governing legislation

GPDO 2015

Relevant schedule and part

Schedule 2, Part 1

Applies to flats or maisonettes?

No

Curtilage coverage limit (outbuildings etc.)

No more than half the area around the original house

Designated land types where restrictions apply

Conservation areas, AONBs, National Parks, the Broads, World Heritage Sites

Prior approval: LPA decision window

42 days from receipt of information

Prior approval: neighbour notice period

Not less than 21 days

In planning terms

Permitted development — Permitted development rights are a national grant of planning permission which allow certain building works and changes of use to be carried out without having to make a planning application. They are set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (GPDO 2015) and are subject to conditions and limitations to control impacts and to protect local amenity.

For homeowners in England, 'permitted development' (PD) rights mean that a wide range of common home improvements can go ahead without the time and cost of a full planning application. The householder PD rights are set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the GPDO 2015, and they cover enlargements and alterations to the house itself, plus a range of works in the land around it.

Regulations change — always check with your local council

The GPDO 2015 has been amended several times since it was made, and local restrictions may narrow what is permitted in your area. Always check with your local planning authority before starting work, and treat this guide as an introduction rather than a definitive statement of current law.

Which classes of development are covered?

Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the GPDO 2015 divides householder PD rights into lettered classes. The guidance covers in detail Classes A to E, which deal with the most common home improvement projects. Classes F to H are also included in the Order and cover additional matters.

Class	Type of development covered
A	Enlargement, improvement or other alteration of the house (including extensions)
B	Additions or alterations to roofs that enlarge the house, such as loft conversions involving dormer windows
C	Other alterations to roofs, such as re-roofing or installation of roof lights/windows
D	Erection of a porch outside an external door
E	Provision of buildings and other development within the curtilage of the house (e.g. sheds, garden offices, outbuildings)
F	Provision of hard surfaces within the curtilage (e.g. driveways)
G	Installation, alteration or replacement of a chimney, flue or soil and vent pipe
H	Installation, alteration or replacement of a microwave antenna such as a satellite dish

It is essential to consider every relevant class when planning any project. For example, a two-storey rear extension whose roof joins onto the main roof of the original house must satisfy the requirements of both Class A (enlargement) and Class C (roof alterations). If the works also create a dormer window, Class B requirements apply as well. In order to be permitted development, a proposal must meet all the limitations and conditions under each class relevant to it.

Larger single-storey rear extensions: when is prior approval needed?

Larger single-storey rear extensions that exceed the standard depth limits set out in Class A, paragraph A.1(f) but fall within the higher limits allowed by paragraph A.1(g) are subject to a neighbour consultation scheme. This means you need to notify your local planning authority (LPA) before work begins and go through a 'prior approval' process.

Before beginning the development you must provide your LPA with a written description of the proposed development — including how far the enlarged part extends beyond the rear wall of the original house, the maximum height of the enlarged part, and the height of its eaves — together with a site plan showing the proposed development, the addresses of any adjoining premises, and your contact details.

Once this information is received, the LPA must notify each adjoining owner or occupier by serving a notice specifying a date (not less than 21 days from the date of the notice) by which any representations must be received. Where any adjoining owner or occupier objects, the prior approval of the LPA is required as to the impact on the amenity of their premises.

You must not begin the development until one of the following occurs: you receive written notice from the LPA that prior approval is not required; you receive written notice giving prior approval; or 42 days have passed from the date the LPA received your information without the LPA notifying you whether prior approval is given or refused.

Prior approval is not the same as full planning permission

Prior approval is a lighter-touch process that allows the LPA to assess specific impacts — here, the effect on the amenity of adjoining premises — rather than the full range of planning considerations. If the LPA refuses prior approval, you can appeal on that refusal under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Loft conversions and roof alterations

Class B covers additions or alterations to a roof that enlarge the house, most commonly loft conversions that involve dormer windows. Class C covers other roof alterations that do not enlarge the house, such as re-roofing or fitting roof lights. If a project involves both enlarging the roof space and altering the roof covering, both classes must be satisfied.

Existing houses that are detached or part of a terrace (including semi-detached houses) may also benefit from permitted development rights to extend upwards by additional storeys under a separate class — Class AA — in order to create new homes or extend existing ones. These rights are subject to prior approval and height restrictions, and do not apply in National Parks, conservation areas, the Broads, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) or sites of special scientific interest.

Outbuildings, sheds and garden offices

Class E permits the provision of buildings and other structures within the curtilage of the house, including sheds, garden offices, swimming pools, enclosures and containers. However, there are important limits on how much of the land around the house these can cover, and restrictions are tighter on designated land and listed buildings.

- No more than half the area of land around the 'original house' may be covered by additions or other buildings.
- No verandas, balconies or raised platforms are permitted under Class E; any platform must not exceed 0.3 metres in height.
- On designated land (National Parks, the Broads, AONBs, conservation areas and World Heritage Sites), buildings, enclosures, containers and pools at the side of properties will require planning permission rather than being permitted development.
- In National Parks, the Broads, AONBs and World Heritage Sites, the maximum area to be covered by buildings, enclosures, containers and pools more than 20 metres from the house is limited to 10 square metres.
- Within the curtilage of a listed building, any outbuilding will require planning permission.

In planning terms

Original house — The term 'original house' means the house as it was first built, or as it stood on 1 July 1948 if it was built before that date. Even if you have never built an extension, a previous owner may have done so, and that earlier work counts towards the cumulative limits.

Porches and hard surfaces

Class D permits the erection of a porch outside an external door of the house. Class F covers the provision of hard surfaces within the curtilage of the house, such as driveways and paved areas. As with all PD rights, the conditions and limitations under the relevant class must be met, and local restrictions may apply.

Where do permitted development rights NOT apply?

It is important to understand that householder PD rights are not universal. Several categories of property and area are excluded from these rights, either wholly or in part.

1. Flats and maisonettes

The householder PD rights in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the GPDO 2015 do not apply to any house that is a flat. The definition of 'dwellinghouse' in the Order does not include buildings containing one or more flats or a single flat contained within a building.

2. Houses created through change of use

PD rights do not apply to houses created through the permitted development rights to change use set out in Classes M, N, P, PA and Q of Part 3 of Schedule 2 to the Order (conversions from shops, financial and professional services premises, hot food takeaways, betting shops, pay day loan shops, amusement arcades, casinos, launderettes, storage or distribution premises, light industrial premises and agricultural buildings). In these cases planning permission should be sought.

3. Designated land (Article 2(3) land)

Many PD rights are restricted or removed on Article 2(3) land, which covers land within a National Park, the Broads, an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), an area designated as a conservation area, and land within World Heritage Sites.

4. Article 4 directions

A local planning authority (or, in some cases, the Secretary of State) may make an Article 4 direction removing PD rights in a specific area or for specific types of development. Where such a direction is in place, a full planning application is required. An Article 4 direction does not mean development is prohibited — it means the LPA has the opportunity to consider the proposal in detail.

5. Planning conditions

The original planning permission for a house, or a subsequent permission, may have included a condition removing some or all PD rights. Always check with your LPA to see whether any such condition affects your property, particularly on newer housing developments.

6. Listed buildings

Within the curtilage of a listed building, any outbuilding will require planning permission, and listed building consent may also be required for works to the building itself.

Permitted development rights allow householders to improve and extend their homes without the need to apply for planning permission where that would be out of proportion with the impact of works carried out.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Permitted Development Rights for Householders: Technical Guidance

What is a Lawful Development Certificate and do you need one?

Even when you are confident that your project is permitted development, there is no official record of that fact unless you apply for a 'lawful development certificate' (LDC) from your LPA. An LDC is not compulsory, but it gives you certainty — and reassurance for future buyers and mortgage lenders.

There are two types of LDC. The first confirms that an existing use, operational development or activity is lawful for planning purposes (under section 191 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990). The second confirms that a proposed use or development would be lawful (under section 192 of the same Act). Once a certificate is granted under section 192, any proposed use or development in accordance with it must be presumed to be lawful, unless there is a material change before the use or development has begun.

Anyone can apply to their LPA for an LDC. If the authority is satisfied that the appropriate legal tests are met, it will grant the certificate. The key statutory framework for LDC applications is set out in sections 191 to 193 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Does permitted development mean you can ignore building regulations?

No. Permitted development rights do not remove requirements for permissions or consents under other regimes, such as the building regulations and the Party Wall etc Act 1996. These are entirely separate legal frameworks. Even if your project is permitted development for planning purposes, you will very likely need to comply with building regulations — which protect the health, safety, energy efficiency and structural integrity of buildings — and you may need to notify your local authority's building control service or appoint an approved inspector before starting work.

Check building regulations separately

Building regulations apply to most structural work, new habitable rooms, electrical installations, drainage alterations and changes affecting energy efficiency, regardless of whether planning permission or PD rights are engaged. Contact your local building control authority or visit [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) for guidance on Approved Documents and the Building Regulations 2010.

Before you start: practical steps to check

Given the complexity of the rules and the potential for local variations, it is wise to take the following steps before starting any project you believe to be permitted development.

1. Check whether your property is on Article 2(3) land — that is, within a conservation area, AONB, National Park, the Broads or a World Heritage Site — as many PD rights are restricted or removed in these areas.
2. Ask your LPA whether an Article 4 direction applies to your property or street, which would require you to apply for planning permission for works that would otherwise be permitted development.
3. Check the original planning permission for your house (and any subsequent permissions) to see whether a condition removes or restricts your PD rights.

4. Confirm whether your property is a flat, maisonette or a house created through a change-of-use conversion — if so, householder PD rights under Part 1 of Schedule 2 do not apply.
5. If your property is a listed building or within the curtilage of one, seek specialist advice before carrying out any works.
6. Consider applying for a lawful development certificate (LDC) if you want formal confirmation that your proposed works are lawful — particularly useful if you plan to sell your home.
7. Always check building regulations requirements separately and before work starts.