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Developing your home in Guernsey: Personal choice and the flexibility provided by the Island Development Plan

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The island of Guernsey has a dramatic coastline and expansive sea views, an historic, picturesque town and harbour regularly rated amongst the best ports of call in the British Isles, a beautiful rural interior characterised by narrow lanes and ancient field patterns, and a diverse architectural heritage dating from the middle ages right through to the present day.

Known for its safe and friendly environment, excellent work-life balance and mild climate, it's no wonder that people from around the world choose to make their home in Guernsey.

The Island Development Plan ("the IDP") is the set of policies that governs what can be built, where, and how buildings and land are used. It acknowledges and provides general support for the reasonable aspirations people have to redevelop, extend or improve their homes, including, for example, providing additional accommodation, enhancing living standards, altering the functionality or appearance of a building, or upgrading existing fabric, and installing renewable energy infrastructure to help reduce fuel bills.

Subject to a general expectation that all new development should achieve a good standard of design, the IDP is also supportive of home owners exerting personal choice in design matters. The Planning Service is required to take a reasonable and proportionate approach when dealing with planning applications for householder development, and to provide home owners with greater freedom of choice with regard to private property development and use.

In practical terms, this means that replacement dwellings can be substantially larger than the existing building, and proposals for other forms of householder development are not obliged to replicate the materials, character or form of surrounding development, or, for example, to be constrained by nearby building heights.

Of course, there will always be exceptions to the rule, and some parts of the Island are more sensitive to building design than others, such as those within Conservation Areas or where development relates to protected buildings and their settings. In these areas, development will be expected to achieve a particularly high standard of design. However, the flexibility inherent in the IDP means that contemporary or traditional design approaches can be followed, and that new development does not necessarily have to replicate the scale, mass, detail or special interest of the surrounding built form.

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Overall, for those who have or are considering moving to Guernsey from jurisdictions where planning policies and design guidance may more strictly control the scale, form and design of replacement dwellings or home extension and remodelling projects, the flexible approach promoted by the IDP will be a refreshing change.

There is real scope for home owners to let their imagination run free in Guernsey and, when it comes to realising their vision, the island is extremely well-served in the number and quality of architectural firms practising here. The bi-annual Guernsey Design Awards are testament to this, promoting distinctive, original, inspirational and sustainable design of the built environment in Guernsey.

For those properties or schemes that may push the boundaries or require a particularly nuanced approach, home owners should consider seeking professional planning advice from the outset to fully understand the opportunities and challenges involved, and to increase the likelihood of planning permission being granted at the first time of asking. Consultants who are members of the Royal Town Planning Institute are trusted worldwide as abiding by the highest professional and ethical standards.

For more information or advice on redeveloping your home in Guernsey, contact Chris Crew on 01481 734253.

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