

Top tips to getting your planning application right first time

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During the Covid-19 pandemic, Channel Island homeowners responded to restrictions on travel, increased home working and a rising property market by driving a boom in home extension, remodelling and improvement projects.

Despite the pandemic, thankfully, being behind us, the home improvement trend is likely to continue.

Common reasons that homeowners choose to extend, remodel or improve their existing home can include:

- Changing family circumstances, for instance when children are born or leave home, or when elderly relatives need care and support.
- Needing more space to be able to work from home.
- Avoiding the hassle and cost of moving, particularly when you already live in an area that you know and like.
- The opportunity to tailor your house to you and your way of living, creating designs and spaces that are unique to you.
- Increasing the value of your property, and helping to maximise the return on what is typically the largest investment any of us will make.

Many such projects will require planning permission, but the planning system can seem opaque and difficult to navigate. The time taken for planning applications to be determined has increased across the Channel Islands in recent years, whilst at the same time the accessibility of planning officers and the speed with which pre-application enquiries are answered has reduced.

For homeowners who may be engaging with the planning system for the first time these factors can make for a daunting prospect, and the risk of permission being refused after investing often considerable amounts of time and money can be a very real source of stress and worry.

With all that being said, here are eight top tips for how to navigate the planning process successfully:

Think about what you want to achieve

It might seem obvious, but giving early and careful thought to this vital question will help to ensure that your brief to your architect is clear, and make it more likely that you will be delighted with the end result.

Start as soon as possible

Developing a design, obtaining planning permission, satisfying Building Control requirements, finding a builder and getting finance in place takes a lot longer than many people think.

Talk to your neighbours

They will be less likely to object if kept informed about your plans from an early stage, and you will be able to consider making changes to your design if they do have concerns.

Research local planning policies

Policies and land designations differ across the Channel Islands and you will need to consider how this might affect your project. If you live in a historic building, or if the works would affect existing trees or wildlife, specialist reports may be required to support your application.

Choose an architect with the right experience and skills for your project

You need to be confident that your architect understands and can deliver what you want and need, based on your budget and how you live in your home now and hope to in the future- this is where a clear brief will be invaluable. You also need to be confident that they will be open to your thoughts and ideas as they develop a design (you need to be open to their ideas as well.) Look for recommendations from friends and family, meet with different architects, ask to see examples of similar projects that they have worked on (and look at those on the ground if they have been completed) and choose someone whose work you like and who you get on with.

Be realistic

If local planning policies restrict certain forms of development or apply different criteria in different locations, you may have to compromise in order to obtain planning permission.

Factor in a budget contingency

Keep in mind that as the design is developed and more detailed costings become available, you may need to make changes to stay within your budget. If any such changes are significant, you may need to seek further planning permission at the cost of further expense and time.

Consider the benefits of seeking professional planning advice

A Planning Consultant will understand the planning system and how specific policies are applied. They can help you and your architect to develop a design that complies with those policies and delivers most, if not all, that you hope to achieve. They can advise on what supporting information may be required, minimising the risks of delays and additional costs by ensuring that the application is accepted as valid from the outset, and making it more likely that permission is granted at the first time of asking.

A well-designed home extension, remodelling or improvement project can exceed your expectations, deliver real value for money, and transform how you live in your home. With careful thought and expert advice, it can be achieved more easily than you might imagine.

About Chris Crew

Based in Guernsey, but with a practice spanning the whole of the Channel Islands, Chris is Collas Crill's Senior Planning Consultant and a Chartered Member of The Royal Town Planning Institute with more than 18 years' experience gained in the UK and Guernsey. He joined the firm in 2022 from the States of Guernsey Planning Service where he worked as a Senior Planning Officer for eight years.

About Collas Crill's Planning Service

Collas Crill has a proven track record for planning matters, including initial advice, and running all the way through to successful planning appeals. Our aim is to make the planning process as simple as possible, bearing in mind at all times our clients' primary goal. Services we offer:

- initial options and feasibility analyses
- pre-application enquiries
- completing and submitting planning applications
- exemption queries
- development frameworks
- planning and lawful use certificate applications
- discharge and variation of planning conditions
- enforcement matters
- planning appeals
- general planning advice

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