

# Join the race to create more space

For many, lockdown has highlighted a need for an extra room — but is the cost worth it? Carol Lewis reports

Not everyone came out of lockdown wanting to move house as soon as possible. Many thought that their homes just needed a tweak here and there — a home office, a gym, a play den or an extra bedroom.

The latest figures show that of the 109,045 planning applications submitted this year to the end of May, more than half (61,682) were during the 13 weeks of national quarantine. Architects report that homeowners' appetites for change show no sign of abating, with many more extensions coming under permitted development rights, which means they do not need planning permission.

We are in a collective race for space before further lockdowns force us into working and living in close confines once again.

“Lots of people like where they live. I spoke to a couple the other day with two teenage children, they need more space. They know it could be cheaper to move but they can't find anywhere they like as much.

“People are asking for home offices: some the sort you put at



A double-height basement extension by Ade Architecture  
MATT CLAYTON

the bottom of the garden, others taking over the garage — let's face it, few people put their car in there,” he says.

Natasha Armstrong, 34, a teacher, and her husband, Brad, 36, in the armed forces, live in a three-bedroom detached house near Sittingbourne in Kent. They are among those who discussed changing their home during lockdown. “We sat in the garden watching our next door neighbours' extension being built. They were adding an extra bedroom and when they told us it cost £30,000 our jaws dropped. It would cost us more than £100,000 to upgrade to a four-bedroom house.

“During lockdown, all living closely together, we also realised we wanted to move the

playroom and knock a wall out downstairs to give us more open-plan space. Then we will have our dream home. I love living here and I don't want to move, so this is the perfect solution.”

The most commonly submitted planning application is for single-storey extensions, followed by two-storey extensions and loft conversions, while least popular are porches, conservatories and annexes, according to planning application data compiled by Barbour ABI for Santander bank. The majority of applications for extensions were made in the South East, London and east of England, with the least in Scotland, Wales and the North East.





Deciding whether to build an extension is a balancing act, though: “It is generally not a way to make a profit. On average, if you do an extension and sell the next day you won’t get your money back. I also tell people that if you are planning on moving in the next three to five years then don’t extend, move,” Owen says. “The cost, time and upheaval are not worth it for such a short time.”

“You do need to look at the ceiling price on the street. There is no point spending loads on a house which will then become the most expensive property on a street that nobody wants to pay that much to live on.”

The economics of extending are particularly pertinent given that the cost of building materials and labour is rising, with builders in scarce supply and planning applications taking longer to process post-lockdown.

“Brexit weakened the pound, which when combined with the economic recovery in Eastern Europe has meant that a lot of Polish skilled labour has left, which is driving prices up,” says Michael Holmes, the chairman of the National Custom and Self Build Association.

Two years ago Holmes estimated that the most basic extension would cost £129-£157 per square foot, today it is between £134 and £163 per sq ft (excluding VAT).

“It varies regionally too.



Generally, building becomes cheaper as you move away from London and the South East, with the exception of the major urban centres such as Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester,” he says.

The cost of extending is divided evenly between labour and material costs,

“The pool of

skilled labour has diminished and the price of materials increased — for instance there is a real shortage of bricks at the moment.”

clients to budget about £200-£300 per sq ft for an extension and add 10-15 per cent





contingency fund to cover unexpected costs.

Architect fees are typically between 5 and 15 per cent of the cost and it is probably best to get this fixed at the beginning of the project.

It is also best to employ an architect who has a relationship with your local planning authority, because it can add hugely to the bill, and the time it takes to complete a project, if your application is turned down and you need to appeal.

seeking pre-application advice before formally submitting your planning application to increase the chance of success. “It is a good way of gauging sentiment and seeking informal advice. It makes the process a lot smoother. You work alongside the planning officers and are less likely to get an outright refusal.”

“We often present the client with a couple of options: one that will get planning permission and one that might not. If they choose the low-risk one we can crack on organising the project while it is being considered, if they go for the more high-risk one then everything has to go on pause while we wait for the planning outcome.”

seeking a Lawful Development Certificate from the council if you are building under permitted development rights. “This takes away risk and can help with resale value when you come to sell. It protects the client and the value of the



property.”

Here we look at the cost versus the return on value for the most popular renovations.

### Garden room

**Budget:** £20,777-£31,165

**Uplift in value:** 5-15 per cent

Robin Chatwin, the head of Savills estate agency in southwest London, says: “I think garden rooms have increased in value post-lockdown and people are prepared to pay more of a premium. Those which have proper planning permission and plumbing, and could have a bedroom, probably add the most value.”

“Conservatories are probably less valued than side returns and single-storey extensions though,” he adds.

For a conservatory, budget £25,971 to £51,942, says Holmes. Porches and conservatories tend to be more popular in rural areas such as Cornwall and Wiltshire than urban ones, according to Santander.

### Single-storey extensions

**Budget:** £15,583-£31,165 (side-return extension: £20,777-£31,165)

**Uplift in value:** About 10 per cent

“Open-plan living remains a popular option,”

Barnet in north London, Ealing in west London, Leeds and Birmingham head the list for these types of extensions.

### Loft conversions

**Budget:** £31,165-£62,330

**Uplift in value:** 5-15 per cent

“Loft conversions are very popular with families — you can usually add two children’s bedrooms or a bedroom and bathroom,” Chatwin says. Loft conversions are popular in the suburbs: Barnet in north London, Bromley in southeast London, and Brent in northwest London top the list for these.

### Basement

**Budget:** £124,660-£186,990

**Uplift in value:** 10-15 per cent

“There is only so far you can extend out in some urban locations so people tend to extend below ground. Media rooms, gyms and home offices are popular choices for basements,” Chatwin says. These are most common in expensive urban areas despite stringent planning restrictions: Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster and Wandsworth in London were the top boroughs for these kinds of planning applications. It tends not to be worth doing for homes which are worth less than £1 million and certainly not worth the upheaval if you have the space to expand at ground level. **Home Extension Design by Julian Owen is available from RIBA bookshops and online from £16 (paperback) ■**

