



DESIGN DOCTOR

What can be done to amend the design of a house that has already achieved planning consent?

Over the last decade, land owners up and down the country have been encouraged by the escalation in land values to squeeze the maximum value from their land by seeking planning consent for additional houses, with the assistance of the local architect.

Often this land has never been developed and is located on backland or infill space. In the green belt planning officers are very concerned about retaining 'openness' and reducing the impact of any new building that they consider may be 'intrusive' in a landscape. They often impose design constraints upon architects that can result in some unusual looking buildings.

In this case our reader wants to purchase a plot with planning consent for a single house, located alongside a group of farm buildings. The question he asked of Design Doctor is: does he have to stick to the agreed design, as he has some issues with the layout and appearance?

Very briefly the answer is no. However, it is quite possible that the architect had difficulty

in obtaining planning consent – farm buildings are usually located on green belt land, which means that the size, shape, height and general appearance are often very tightly controlled. I imagine that he had to negotiate permission by a string of amendments, which may have led to the design becoming compromised.

This negotiation has however been a very profitable exercise for the land owner as the consent increases his site value considerably, thus the architect has succeeded for his client.

Can a new site owner now change the appearance and layout of the permitted house? The answer is a guarded yes.

Design Doctor's diagnosis

Before reviewing the options for a re-design it is probably a good idea to speak to the planning officer who dealt with the application, or if they are not available you can read their report on the application, usually online at the local district council website, or through the Planning Portal website. This will tell you what the key constraints for the design were. »



THE PROJECT

Is it worth redesigning an approved dwelling in order to tailor the house to the owner's needs, or should they stick with what's approved?

In reviewing the layout of the house I have assumed that the footprint and the majority of the roof outline will have to be retained, and have investigated a better interior layout. I spotted that the permitted roof is very high, and contains a really decent amount of space in the loft which could be used to create a well-proportioned guest bedroom suite, play area or home office with great views.

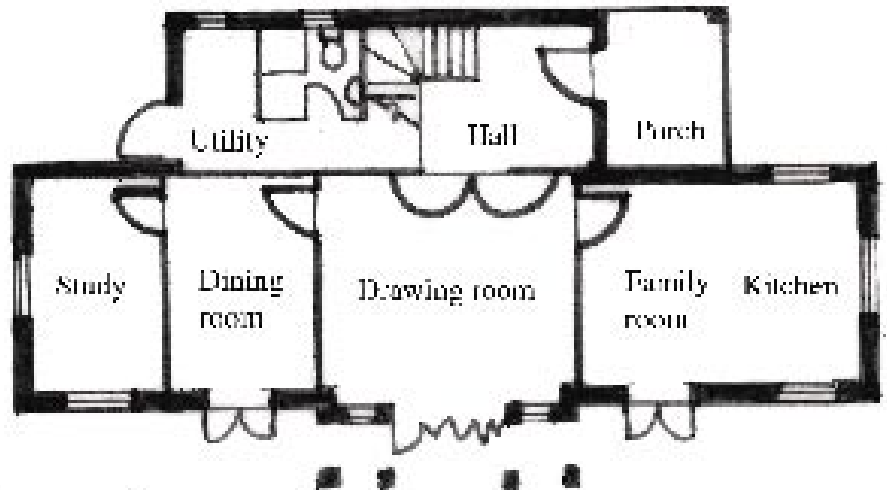
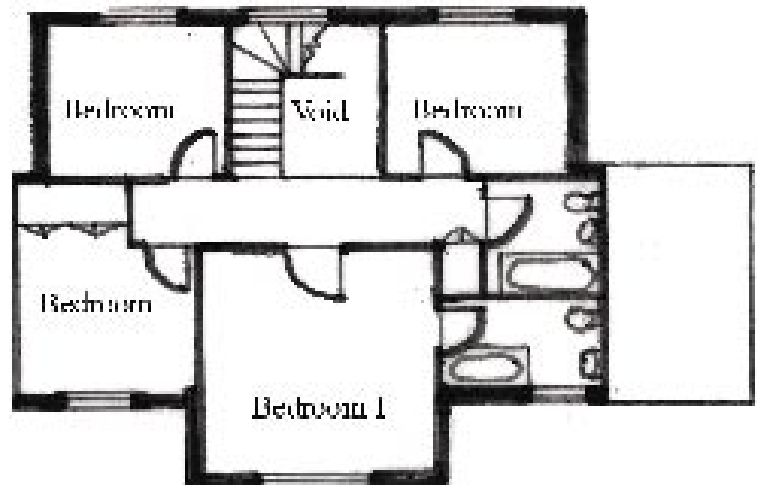
The purchaser's thoughts

The owner can obviously read plans quite well and had a number of concerns about the approved layout (right):

- 1 The kitchen and utility room are at opposite ends of the building
- 2 You have to pass through the drawing room to move through the building
- 3 He prefers a central front door; the porch area could then be enclosed.
- 4 Would like a toilet close to the front door
- 5 The utility space is too small
- 6 The roof line appears to be expensive
- 7 Upstairs needs a second en-suite
- 8 Would this type of design be suitable for a timber frame with a brick and tile cladding?

I agree on the main points, and was also concerned that the best elevation with the central gable – an illustration of which was used by the estate agent to market the plot – is actually at the rear of the house, and the front is very plain and unwelcoming.

In response I have sketched revised plans showing how the house can be simply revised almost completely within the existing approved building envelope.



A simple re-arrangement

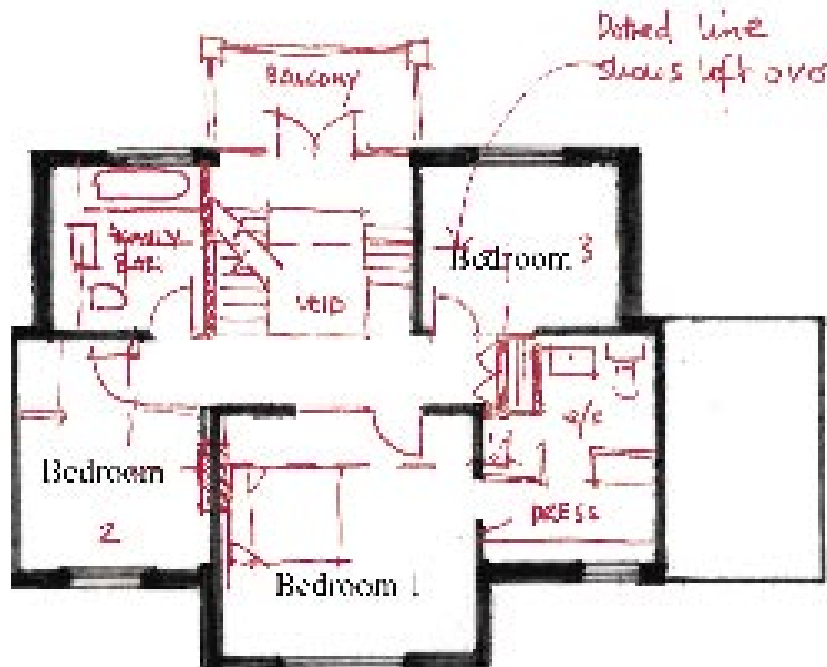
The most important feature of a house is the front and entrance. It sets the scene for the whole experience of approaching and entering the property. I have proposed:

- Building a new gabled porch on the front of the house in order to give it an equivalent impact to the rear. This will require a revised planning submission as it increases the volume of the property.
- Moving the entrance to the centre of the house frees up the wings to provide a more simple, contemporary layout, with a grand open hall and galleried staircase.
- Removing the dividing wall into the original drawing room creates a huge through entrance hall which looks straight out on to the garden, creating an excellent dining room next to the kitchen.

The rest of the spaces flow naturally from this new hall and with little change to the exterior now creates downstairs:

- A formal sitting room off the dining hall. I have added in a chimney to allow a fireplace into both drawing room and dining hall – this could be contemporary double sided glass to allow the flow of light and views.





PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR



PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR

Know this!

- Don't assume that because a plot has consent for one house, you can then build any other one instead. Variations will require another application, and could take a lot of time
- In green belt areas the size will be restricted, so if the consented house is not big enough, it's possible that it will not work for you
- The front of the building is very important. Improvements to the design may attract planning officer's support
- There is no planning constraint on the design of the interior layout, so if you want to change it, I'd recommend you go ahead and plan the house of your dreams

- A small study off the drawing room, in a quiet location away from the informal family space.
 - A good sized utility/back door off the kitchen
 - Space for a WC and coats under the stairs.
- Upstairs the master suite now has a good sized dressing room and ensuite bathroom; a family bathroom serves the other bedrooms at this level, and I have suggested that the loft be converted to take advantage of the height. This can be accessed simply by adding another tier to the stairs and can provide a large guest suite.

Hopefully the layout will now work to suit the property's new owner.

He was worried about the cost of the proposed roof, however the architect has cleverly shown the main roof as a very simple hipped shape with catslide extensions over the side wings. This should not prove to be a very expensive built form.



The materials to be used for the exterior of the building will have formed part of the planning consent, and usually there will be conditions attached to the consent requiring samples to be approved in writing before the building can start on site. Brick and tile claddings are probably going to be quite acceptable, but I would strongly advise the purchaser to consult the planners before making his final selection.

The structure of the building however is not a planning issue. Timber frame is a sustainable and quick method of construction, and having just created my own house of timber frame I think it really excellent. With the right detailing and insulation this could be a very low energy house to maintain.

I wish our reader a very happy build! ●

The design doctor



Jane Duncan is the director of Jane Duncan Architects, an architecture and interior design practice specialising in sustainable construction methods. She is also building her own sustainable

family home. Her practice works on a wide range of buildings, including homes, historic and listed properties, farm redevelopments, timber-frame buildings, commercial and mixed-use buildings, substantial remodelling projects, and more recently new-build sustainable and contemporary buildings. Visit www.janeduncanarchitects.co.uk

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built or unbuilt - for consideration by the Design Doctor, email buildit@oceanmedia.co.uk Please note: only those selected for publication will be appraised