

A Homeowner's Guide to Planning Permission

A clear, jargon-free introduction to the UK planning system — so you can start your project with confidence.

1. Do you need planning permission?

Not every project needs a planning application. Many smaller works fall under “permitted development”, while larger or more sensitive schemes will need formal consent from your local planning authority. As a rule of thumb, you are more likely to need permission if your project:

- Significantly changes the size, height or footprint of your home
- Alters the use of a building (for example, a barn to a dwelling)
- Affects a listed building or sits within a conservation area
- Impacts neighbours through overlooking, overshadowing or loss of light

2. Permitted development

Permitted development rights allow certain extensions and alterations without a full application — though limits on height, depth and materials apply, and rights are often restricted in conservation areas, on flats and on listed buildings. A Lawful Development Certificate is a wise way to confirm your project is permitted before you build.

3. Listed buildings & conservation areas

Works to a listed building usually require Listed Building Consent, even for internal changes. In conservation areas, additional controls protect the character of the area. These projects reward a sensitive, well-evidenced approach — exactly the kind of design and heritage statements we prepare in support of an application.

4. Planning vs Building Regulations

These are two separate approvals. Planning permission governs what you can build and how it looks; Building Regulations govern how it is built — structure, insulation, fire safety and accessibility. Most projects need to satisfy both.

5. The journey, stage by stage

We guide every project through the RIBA Plan of Work, Stages 0 to 7:

- Discover (Stage 0–1) — understanding you, your site and your brief
- Design (Stage 2) — concept design that responds to its setting
- Planning (Stage 3) — developing and submitting the application
- Technical Design (Stage 4) — detailed drawings and Building Regulations
- Construction (Stage 5–6) — tender, contract administration, CDM
- Completion (Stage 7) — handover and beyond

6. Five tips for a smoother application

- Engage an architect early — good design pre-empts objections
- Understand your site's constraints and opportunities first
- Talk to neighbours before you submit
- Use pre-application advice for complex or sensitive sites
- Build a clear, well-illustrated case — drawings tell the story

How MEA Architects can help

We offer a full architect's service (RIBA Stages 0–7), from feasibility and measured surveys to planning, listed building consent, building regulations and contract administration. We offer an initial consultation — by phone or in person — to discuss your project and establish the scope of services required.

Start your project

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