

The Friends of Lewes

Guiding Principles for the Design of Dormer
Windows

January 2014

Introduction

Dormer windows contribute greatly to the variety of roof forms and their appearance can significantly affect the architectural integrity of a building and the visual amenity of an area.

Some dormers were conceived and constructed as part of the original building design, but many have been added at a later date to allow better use of attic space or to take advantage of attractive views. In earlier years these dormers were usually accommodated without upsetting the balance of the roof. More recently, however, the introduction of many large and inappropriate box style dormers has damaged the character and appearance of some neighbourhoods. Many planning applications now concentrate on the maximisation of internal floor space and inadequate attention is given to external form. The balance and visual interest previously achieved by dormers is often absent. This loss is detrimental to the external appearance of the building itself and the street scene in general.

The Friends of Lewes Society aims to stimulate public interest in the beauty, history and character of the town of Lewes and its surrounding area; and to promote better design in development proposals. It believes that new dormer windows or roof extensions should respect the scale and massing of the building and they should not dominate or overwhelm the original roof. They should also preserve and enhance the character of the neighbourhood and not have an adverse impact on the appearance of the street scene. This guidance sets out the key principles the Society encourages property owners, developers and architects to follow in the design of new dormer windows. Appendix 1 also contains illustrations of examples of better design, which the Society seeks to promote.

The Friends of Lewes Planning Committee reviews all planning applications submitted to the South Downs National Park Planning Authority (SDNPA) for development proposed in Lewes. Every planning application is considered on its merits and this guidance is used as the yardstick against which each application for a new dormer window is assessed. Friends of Lewes forwards its comments to Lewes District Council's Planning Department to whom the decision responsibility is usually delegated (more significant applications are determined by the SDNPA). If comments are submitted to the local planning authority they are made either in support of or objecting to aspects of the planning application.

The Guiding Principles below have been informed by advice provided by local planning authority offices, supported by appeal decisions, and the results of a review of Supplementary Planning Guidance on dormer windows published by other local planning authorities.

Guiding Principles

1. New dormers should preserve the character of the neighbourhood and be in keeping with existing buildings or group of buildings. Where visible from the public realm and the wider surrounding topography, dormers should not have an adverse impact on the appearance of the street scene.
2. Dormers should sit well within the roof slope and typically be set away from gables, hips and down from the roof ridge in order that the roofline is retained unaltered.
3. Proposals to alter existing roof profiles from hipped end to gable in order to accommodate a new dormer should not undermine the proportions, balance or character of the building or group.
4. Where there is symmetry in the existing fenestration, dormers should be placed so as to form a definite relationship with the main features of the building's façade and should be aligned and be symmetrical with other windows and doors on the building.
5. Hierarchy within fenestration should be respected and windows should reflect the style and proportion of existing windows
6. Materials used for the cheeks and sides of the dormer should match or be sympathetic to the original roofing material.

In addition, for listed buildings and buildings within the Conservation Area:

7. Where dormers are part of the vernacular character of the building, the design and materials must be architecturally and historically accurate and must reflect the character of the building and area.
8. Dormers should normally have a traditional appearance and kept as small as possible with particular regard to height.
9. There should be no adverse impact on historic fabric e.g. beams should not be cut to fit dormers.
10. The replacement of inappropriate dormers and roof extensions with architecturally and historically accurate dormers will be supported.

1. Appendix 1

It is proposed that this section should include pictures of dormer windows which illustrate better design principles. The content will be regularly reviewed to include new material as it becomes available.