

The Design of Dormer Windows

Planning Advice Note



Friends of Lewes

Introduction

Lewes is fortunate in having many fine buildings and areas that are distinguished by their differing periods and styles of architecture, landscaping and history. Most of the historic area has been designated as a Conservation Area and the most significant individual buildings have been “Listed” as buildings of special architectural and historic interest. Whilst other parts of the town have not been selected for special designation, they are attractive and well cared for. Many areas were carefully planned with individual buildings following a common architectural style.

The aim of the designation of Conservation Areas, the listing of individual buildings, and planning controls in general is to protect what is good and attractive about the buildings and areas in the town. It is not to turn Lewes into an open air museum. Nor is it to prevent people upgrading and making sensible changes to their homes to meet their current needs. However, as Lewes is the principal town within the South Downs National Park it is essential that future development conserves and enhances the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.

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, many large and inappropriate flat roofed dormers have been built without the need for planning permission under Permitted Development Rights. These over dominant features on the skyline have damaged the character and appearance of some neighbourhoods. Furthermore, many planning applications now concentrate on provision of headroom to meet Building Regulations and maximising internal floor space, with inadequate attention 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.

Roof extensions are not “permitted development” in National Parks and conservation areas. As Lewes now falls within the South Downs National Park all roof extensions require planning permission and must demonstrate that their development conserves and enhances the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the area. Poorly designed roof extensions built under historic permitted development rights should not be regarded as a precedent for granting permission for new ones of similar design. Equally, the requirement to meet Building Regulations headroom requirements is not a justification for large scale dormers that have an adverse visual impact.

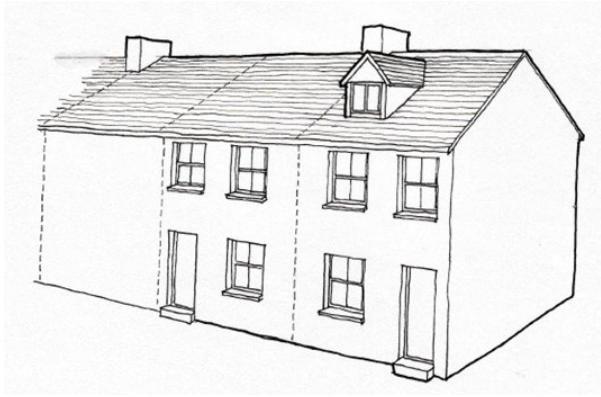
Guiding Principles

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 be over dominant and have an adverse impact on the appearance of the street scene.

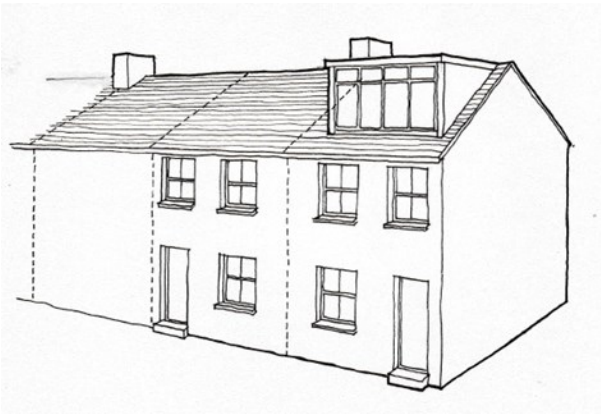
1. Dormers should complement the existing property and sit well within the roof slope. They should be set away from gables and hips, and set down from the roof ridge so that the roofline is retained, unaltered.
2. Proposals to alter existing roof profiles from hipped end to gable, in order to accommodate a new dormer, should not undermine the proportions, balance or overall character of the building or group of buildings.
3. 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.
4. Hierarchy within fenestration should be respected and windows in dormers should reflect the style, scale and proportion of existing windows
5. Materials used for the cheeks and sides of the dormer should match or be sympathetic to the original roofing material. Consideration should be given to future maintenance because of the difficulty of access.

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

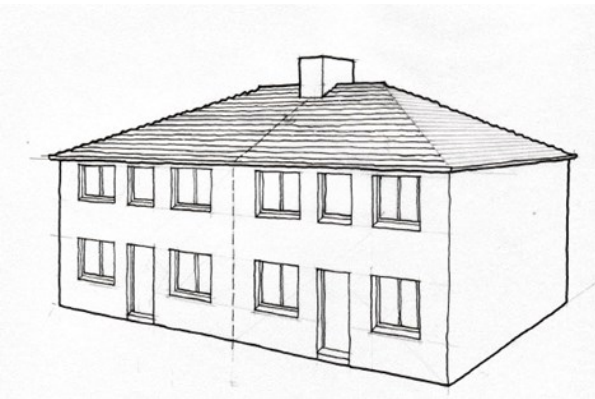
6. Where dormers are part of the vernacular character of the building, the design and materials must be architecturally and historically accurate and must reflect the character of the building and area.
7. Dormers should normally have a traditional appearance and be kept as small as possible with particular regard to height in relation to the ridge of the existing building.
8. There should be no adverse visual impact on the historic fabric of the building, for example if main beams need to be cut to fit dormers. These modifications should not be visible externally.
9. The replacement of inappropriate dormers and roof extensions with architecturally and historically accurate dormers will be supported.



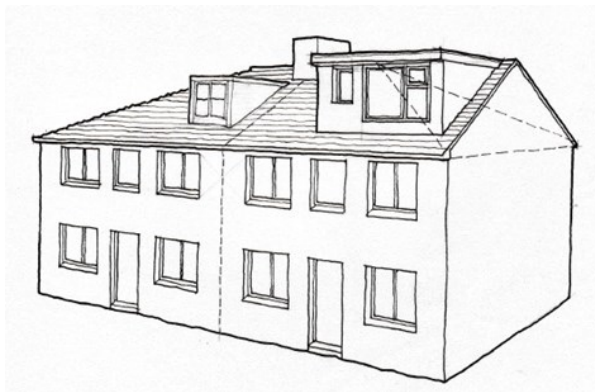
Appropriate dormer



Inappropriate dormer



Typical twentieth century semi-detached house with hipped gables, before alterations.

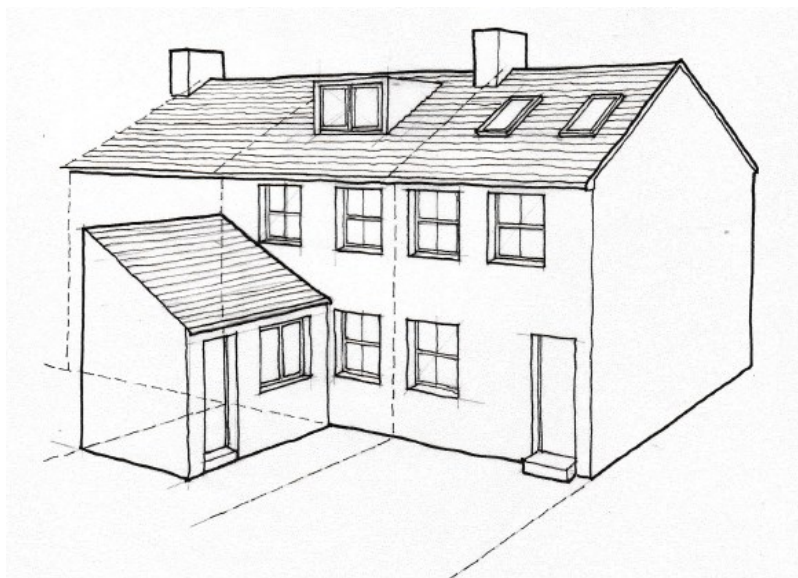


Left hand house



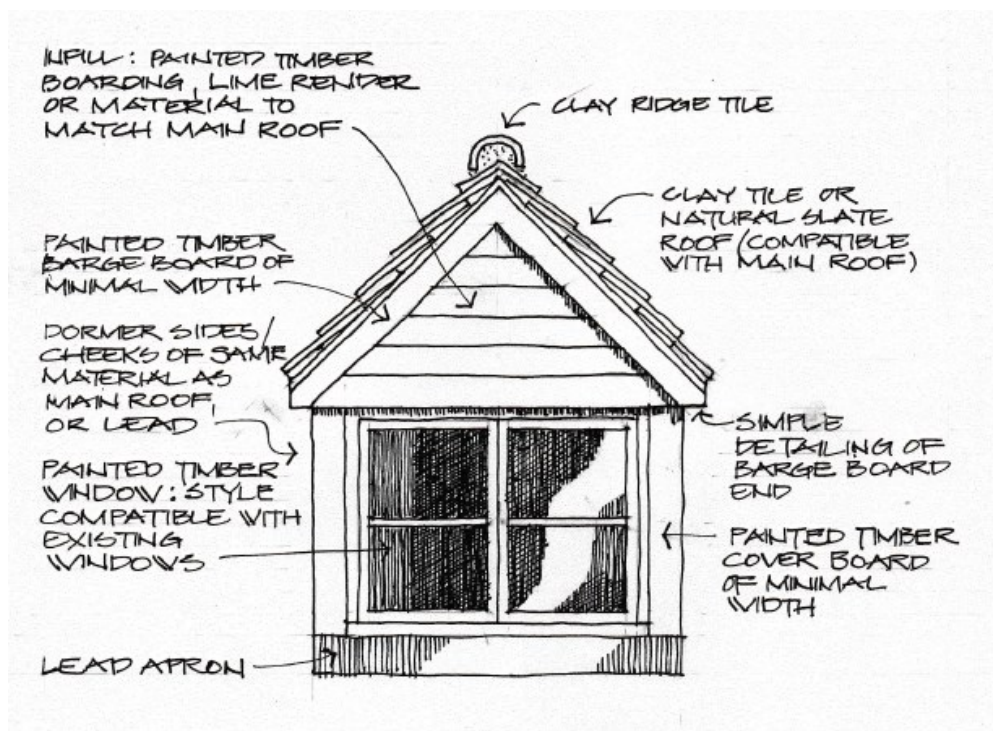
Right hand house

REAR ELEVATIONS



In some instances restrictions may be less stringent but the same principles apply. Conservation style roof windows in the same plane as the roof slope are less intrusive than dormers.

TYPICAL TRADITIONAL DORMER WINDOW WITH PITCHED ROOF



About the Friends of Lewes

The Friends of Lewes Society (The Lewes Civic 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 dormer windows should not be over dominant and their design should not have an adverse visual impact on the existing property or the street scene.

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 dormer 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.



Publication
March 2017 (Revised November 2024)

The Society has also published planning advice notes on
Shopfronts and The Design of Garden Rooms

Friends of Lewes, c/o Town Hall, High Street, Lewes, East
Sussex, BN7 2QS

E-mail: enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Web: <http://www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk>