

Space Craft

If you need more room but perhaps can't make the move to a larger house at the moment, **Andrew Robins** explains how creating additional living space within your existing home could solve the problem

The UK is currently experiencing a housing shortage at the same time as the housing market is grinding to a halt. For anyone looking to move house in order to expand their existing living space, it is a difficult time. A variety of reasons drive us to want more space, such as changes within the family or the more recent requirement driven by web technology enabling us to work at home. As the option of moving is currently not available to many of us, it may be the time to consider how to make the most of your current home.

As a chartered builder I am very lucky to spend much of my time visiting homes in Dorset that require modification or renovation. It is a source of great interest to me to see how well people utilise the space in which they live, especially when looking to carry out building work. Many people look at home improvements as solely a way to add financial value to their home and fail to consider the enjoyment value that is to be gained from well-designed living space.

I often see homes where poorly considered alterations provide neither financial gain nor added value through use. Building work remains expensive and I find



people seem to have greater concern over a comparative build cost than the actual value of what is being created. To maximise both financial and enjoyment value, well-thought-out design is critical. Poor planning and design more often than not create dead space, something any designer worth their salt will avoid.

Expanding your living space at home doesn't always need to be a new extension or converting your loft space. Dead space occurs in most homes and focus can be given to identifying these areas and eliminating it. The modern caravan is a great example where rarely do you find space that isn't fully utilised. These principles can be used in the home. In the current market, the elimination of dead space is the most simple and cost-effective way to create a more spacious home.

When looking to remove dead space, areas to consider are hallways and landings, unused cupboard space, shelving, poor furniture layout, under stairs, chimney breasts and badly-laid-out internal walls. It is often useful to consider how the area would be best used, first by removing the constraints which create the loss of useful space. Then consider how the space needs to work to achieve the desired result. It is

also worth considering that people are integral with homes and it is very noticeable that well-designed homes flow well, allowing ease of communication and movement.

In the last few years changing lifestyles have seen people wanting to increase space in order to create family areas for eating and socialising as well as TV and computer use: studies have been created under staircases or on landings; kitchens have become combined with dining areas; and access to the garden has become an important feature with the addition of parasols and canopies helping to make sheltered areas useable all year round.

Perhaps in this current housing crisis the government should consider reducing VAT from 17.5% to zero on works where people have increased the footprint of their existing property and removed the need to move to a larger home. In a minimal way this will help reduce the housing shortage and ensure a more sustainable society by making the most of what we currently own. □

Andrew Robins BSc(Hons) MCIQB MBEng is Managing Director of Snibor Ltd in Gillingham. ☎01747 825787 or visit www.snibor.co.uk