

Working from Home – A Quick Guide to Town Planning Issues

With the advent of modern technology allowing ever greater freedoms to work almost anywhere, working from home has become an increasingly popular option. Equally, you may be developing a new business venture and 'working from the kitchen table' to begin with as so many start-ups do.

Planning permission is not necessarily required to work from home, but whatever business you carry out from your home - whether it involves using part of it as a bed-sit or for 'bed and breakfast' accommodation, using a room or outbuilding as your personal office, providing a childminding service, for hairdressing, dressmaking or music teaching, or using buildings in the garden for repairing cars or storing goods connected with a business - the key test is: is it still mainly a home or has it become business premises?

If the answer to any of the following questions is 'yes', then planning permission will probably be needed:

- Will your home no longer be used mainly as a private residence?
- Will your business result in a marked rise in traffic or people calling?
- Will your business involve any activities unusual in a residential area?
- Will your business disturb your neighbours at unreasonable hours or create other forms of nuisance such as noise or smells?

Source: Planning Portal

The issue is one of fact and degree. Using the spare bedroom as an office will not normally require permission, but converting the garage to an office with several staff and visiting customers is likely to.

The quickest way to receive a visit from the Council's enforcement officer is to carry out un-neighbourly activities, especially if they lead to a disturbance of some sort. Pick-ups and drop-offs resulting in parking problems or unsocial hours of business can also lead to problems.

If you are in any doubt you can apply to your council for a Certificate of Lawful Use for the proposed activity, to confirm that it is not a change of use and lawful in planning terms.

Can I put up a building up in my garden as an office? This can be achieved without permission if permitted development rights are adhered to. These can be complex and the quickest way to establish whether you need permission is to go to the Planning Portal help guide concerning outbuildings at: <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/permission/commonprojects/outbuildings/miniguide> .

Here again the outbuilding must remain ancillary to the house and used only for the personal enjoyment of the occupants of the house.

In all cases, if the 'business' grows to a point where the property is no longer used primary as a home and/or the effect of the business use on residential amenity has become detrimental, then planning permission will be required.

Take particular care in Conservation Areas and with Listed Buildings. Different rules may apply that limit or remove your Permitted Development Rights. Always check first.

You may also require Building Regulation and/or Listed Building approval; especially for works such as sub-dividing a home or for new building extensions.