

Build or renovate what are the options?

Agonising over whether to demolish a property to make way for a superior new dwelling? Here's what you need to know before choosing to remove or improve



You've found the perfect location, but there's a lot of work to be done to bring the property up to scratch, not to mention Building Regulations standards, and you're not sure if it's actually worth it. Perhaps you should just knock it down and start again. It would be easier, wouldn't it? If you're currently facing this dilemma, the situation may seem a little more complicated than it really is. In fact, sometimes all it takes is the correct assessment to ensure that you won't regret whichever option you choose – to take on a renovation or build your dream home.

Planning matters

Something you need to tackle early on is the cost of each scenario, and also, whether you even have the option of removing the building or changing its use. 'Very few properties are actually able to be demolished, and local planning departments are unlikely to approve a completely new style of building, in place of what is more fitting for the area,' explains Martyn Baum, president of the National Association of Estate Agents. 'So it's important to be sure of exactly what can be built before making the decision to start again.' →



Good substitute ↗

Replacing a Sixties bungalow, this new home features distinctive Flemish-bonded handmade bricks as a nod to the style of the former property and surroundings. Tompkins Rygole Architects (tompkinsrygole.com)



Listed property

Works by Soup Architects (020 7354 1729; souparchitects.com) to re-establish a link between this Grade II-listed property in Richmond with another wing of the stable block have resulted in a sympathetic renovation.

Permitted development

Under the Government's new permitted development (PD) rules, to create a single-storey addition, you can extend out by six metres in depth from the back wall of the property (or up to eight metres for a detached house). For a loft conversion you can add 40 cubic metres to a terraced house, or 50 cubic metres if it's detached – although this should not be higher than the existing roofline. Do bear in mind that these figures include any existing extensions that previous owners have carried out. The benefit of this route is that you won't need to gain consent from your local authority, which can delay the start of works. However, PD does not apply if you are living in a designated area or in a listed

building where you must apply for listed-building consent. For more information visit planningportal.co.uk.

Properties can be offered with permission to rebuild and you might actually be able to adapt the approved plans. The best option is to engage with the local planners early on and see what they would be willing to accept.

Design it right

Starting from scratch opens up endless contemporary design possibilities, subject to approval, and the opportunity to create a super-efficient home with low running costs. Engage the right design professional and they'll help you make the most of the plot. 'We recently completed a project where

5 key steps to help you decide

» **Arrange to meet the planners** at your local council; involving them in your project from the outset can work in your favour.

» **Hire a quantity surveyor** to get a good idea of how much your project will cost.

» **Discuss your ideas** with an architectural professional – better still, a local expert who knows the area and its planners well.

» **Check whether your site** is located in a conservation area, because you may be required to conduct environmental surveys, whether renovating or rebuilding, and some of these can take place only at certain times of the year – bat surveys, for example.

» **Work out in advance** if any services will need to be moved. This can be time-consuming and costly so be sure to contact your service providers well in advance.





Fine form ^

By working closely with local planners, Jane Duncan Architects (01494 766 999; janeduncanarchitects.co.uk) created an impressive home on a fairly traditional street.



Garden room v

This terraced house was carefully refurbished and extended by Fraher Architects (020 8291 6947; fraher.co) to create a spacious living area and a seamless link to the garden.

the original house underutilised the plot's development potential,' says Paul Bulkeley, design director with Snug Architects (023 8202 9500; snugarchitects.co.uk). 'The new house allowed the change in level of the site to be completely integrated into the design, and the result is a dynamic, modern home that fully realises the potential of the site.'

Survey the site

If you're leaning towards the renovation route, then it's crucial to conduct a survey. A quantity surveyor will be able to help you identify what structural works will be required, giving you an idea of the budget you'll need to bring the property up to modern standards. Even if a house is completely dilapidated, it can still be done. 'When it's executed well, a good renovation cost-effectively delivers all the spacial benefits and delights of a new-build,' says

Bulkeley. 'The critical question is, would anyone know that the house is a refurb when it's finished?'

Take SuperHomes (superhomes.org.uk), for instance, a collection of 200 properties that have been refurbished to extremely high standards and have 60 per cent less reliance on fossil fuels. These houses feature high levels of insulation and renewable technologies. 'Renovating a property, rather than demolishing and rebuilding can create a fusion between old and contemporary styles, and can give spectacular results,' adds Baum.

Will it be cost-effective?

One of the most common problems with renovations, and why costs can spiral out of control, is that you don't know what issues you might find behind the walls of an older property. Do you need a new roof, windows and doors, plumbing or rewiring? →



Sympathetic replacement ^

This new-build by Project Orange (020 7739 3035; projectorange.com) replaced a Seventies home – it shares the same footprint and has been set deep into the plot.

BUILDING REGULATIONS

>> Whether your property is a new-build or a renovation, you will have to comply with the latest Building Regulations. These are a set of standards relating to the construction of a property, which focus on structural safety.

>> Building Regulations comprise 14 approved documents (A-R), stating minimum requirements for everything from fire safety to ventilation. In a loft extension, for example, Building Regs Part B requires the installation of fire doors, and for window openings to be at least 45cm wide and offer a means of escape if doors are blocked.

>> A local authority building control officer or approved inspector will visit your home to check that works meet the standards, and will issue a completion certificate. Your property must have this to be deemed habitable. For further information visit planningportal.co.uk and labco.co.uk.

Does the brickwork need attention and repointing? 'At times, it's actually more straightforward, from a builder's perspective, simply to start again,' admits Adam Jannece, director at JCJ Construction (01273 857 886; jcjconstruction.co.uk). 'So you should ask yourself whether there are any existing features that are important to you, and whether you might be able to reuse them within a new-build project.'

VAT cashback

If you're building a new house it's possible to claim back VAT on materials using the VAT notice 431NB (gov.uk/vat-building-new-home). The request needs to be made within three months of the project's completion, and could see you recoup thousands of pounds. Zero-rated elements include fitted kitchens and solar panels, but not carpets, tool hire or professional fees. There's also good news for those renovating, as the Government has introduced a reduced VAT rate of five per cent for the refurbishment of properties that have been unoccupied for at least two years, similarly for the conversions of non-residential buildings (VAT notice 431C).

Ultimately, the decision to renovate or rebuild a property is a personal one. Before making your decision, though, make sure you get as much advice as possible from experienced professionals, who will be able to help you identify which route to take for the results you would like to achieve. **GD**



Filling in ^

This new-build by Satish Jassal Architects (020 7837 4511; satishjassal.co.uk) is the successful transformation of a former garage. This modern home shows what can be achieved when good design meets opportunity.