



TerraQuest

The Home Improvement Barometer

Exploring the latest trends shaping home improvement
across England

| Summer 2026 Edition

Foreword

Welcome to the Home Improvement Barometer, from Planning Portal and TerraQuest

In this new series we will use exclusive Planning Portal application data to dig into the latest and most important trends in the home improvement, renovation and DIY markets.

From rear extensions to additional storeys, we're looking at what people are applying for, where, and how national renovation trends are changing over time. We'll also be looking at what this means for homeowners, renovators, builders and planning consultants.

Planning your own project? You'll also find helpful explainers and approval tips from our expert team of planners and industry partners throughout the Barometer, demystifying some of the most common home improvement projects, to help you apply with confidence.

So, what have we found? Our dataset starts in 2023, giving us a clearer view of homeowner intent beyond the disruption of the Covid years, as life began to return to normal and the effects of lockdown receded.

Since then, we've seen a sustained appetite among homeowners to improve their homes, alongside some interesting fluctuations in activity.

While submissions in some areas have seen some modest decreases since 2023, external sources suggest that interest in moving home has recently been on the rise.

Could this mean the era of 'improve don't move' is coming to an end? It's another theme we'll explore in this report.

In terms of regional renovation, homeowners in the South East, London and the East of England are some of the busiest home improvers in the country.

Applications for larger extensions are concentrated in London. The capital has seen the largest number of home extension applications both this summer and every year since 2023.

Meanwhile, homeowners in the South East and the East of England are most likely to be applying for approval to build upwards.

Another interesting trend? Spring is consistently the season when most homeowners are choosing to apply for planning permission.

Springtime rejuvenation, or the influence of the new tax year? We'll dig further into the why.

As the national planning application service, Planning Portal accepts and processes around 95% of all applications nationally, meaning we have the first and most detailed look at what homeowners are asking for permission to build.

Home improvers have long relied on Planning Portal guidance. That's why we've developed a dedicated range of tools and services to help homeowners navigate their planning journey with greater confidence.



Foreword

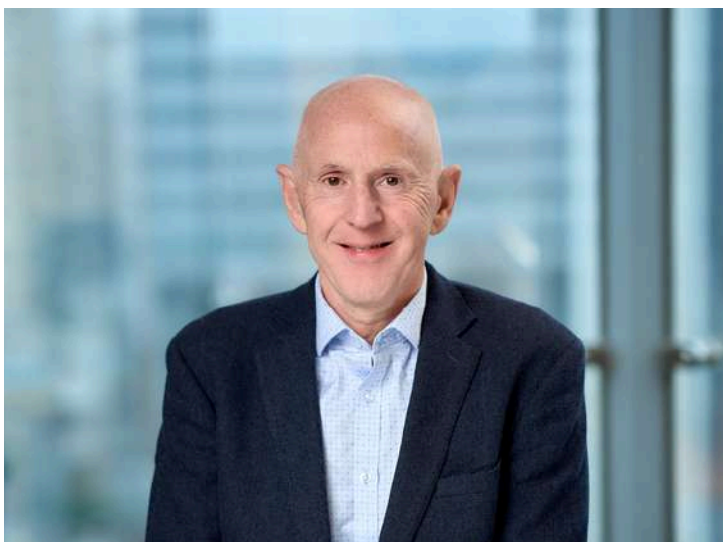
From our Interactive House and AI planning assistant, Ask Navi, to our Householder Insights tool, we're here to help renovators and DIYers understand what's possible and make informed decisions about their projects.

Householder Insights provides a clear picture of a property's planning history, whether permission is likely and the potential for different alterations, while our Planning Guidance Service gives homeowners access to one-to-one tailored advice from our expert planners.

The Home Improvement Barometer adds to that homeowner support - bringing together our exclusive planning data to reveal the trends shaping how, where and when people are improving their homes.

We hope these insights inspire homeowners with ideas for their own projects, while giving the wider home improvement market a clearer picture of the trends shaping England's renovation landscape today.

We're delighted to share the first edition of the Home Improvement Barometer with you.



Geoff Keal | CEO
Planning Portal & TerraQuest



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Short on time?

Here are the

one-minute takeaways

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The way people approach home improvement may be changing

Householder planning applications have **fluctuated in recent years** – with property searches and listings both on the rise ([Zoopla](#))



02

This summer saw

34,655

householder planning applications and prior approvals.



03

London homeowners are most likely to renovate

7 in 100

homeowners in the capital have applied for permission to carry out renovations since 2023 ([ONS Homeownership Data, 2021](#))



04

London, the West Midlands, and the East of England have all seen the **largest proportion of Larger Home Extension applications** per homeowner since 2021, with London, East England and South East being highest for applying for additional storeys.



05

Most homeowners apply in spring

Spring is by far the most popular season for homeowners applying for planning permission – with 28% of all householder planning applications since 2023 submitted during springtime.



Would your project require a planning application?

A Planner explains...

When we talk about **householder applications**, we're talking about the types of **planning applications** that homeowners may need to make to carry out work on their home that falls **outside the remit of permitted development**. Our data set in this report also includes two notable types of prior approval applications – for Larger Home Extensions and Additional Storeys.



What is Permitted development ?

Permitted development – work you can carry out without applying for planning permission – covers a range of projects, including certain sized extensions and loft conversions, porches, outbuildings, and alterations such as roof or window changes, subject to specific rules and limitations.



When you might need planning permission

Where a proposed project **does not meet the permitted development rules** – for example, because of its size, location or the type of work involved – a householder planning application may be required. This means homeowners may need to seek formal permission before starting work.



Examples of projects that require planning

Common examples of projects that would require planning include larger extensions, loft conversions that involve significant changes to the roof, and new or enlarged outbuildings. You may also need an application for some changes to the outside of your home, such as alterations to the roof or adding a balcony.

Some projects that would normally fall under permitted development, however, **may still need planning permission** in some cases. For example, if your home is listed, in a conservation area, or subject to specific planning restrictions.

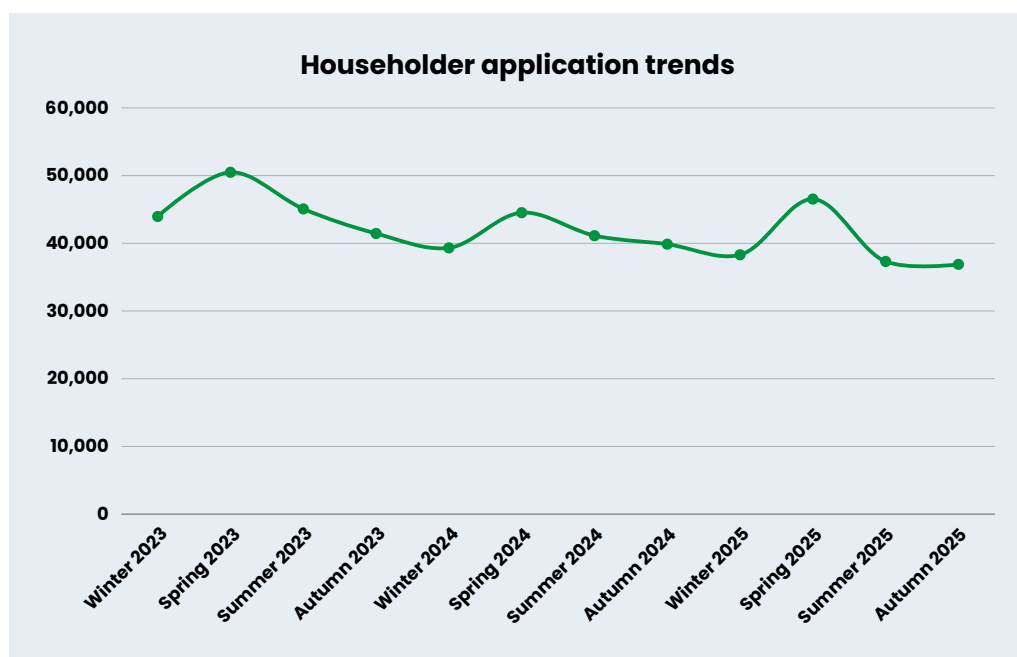
Our advice

The important thing to remember is that there's no one-size-fits-all answer. Whether you need planning permission will depend on the type of work you're planning, your property and the rules that apply to it. That's why it's worth exploring what applies to your home early, before you commit to a design or budget. **Planning Portal's Interactive House** can help you explore the rules for different types of work, while **Ask Navi** and **Householder Insights** can help you look into questions about your property. If you'd prefer to talk through your plans, our **Planning Guidance Service** offers one-to-one advice on calls with an experienced planner.



– John Van Eker
Planning Expert

Is 'improve don't move' changing?



Regionally, application trends are broadly consistent, with application volumes remaining relatively stable since 2023. London saw a 9% reduction in applications submitted between 2023 and 2025, while Wales saw the largest change, at 15%.



Since 2023, we've seen some **fluctuations** in homeowner applications.

Are fewer people renovating?

The answer may not be so simple. Whilst householder application levels have fluctuated, the significant renovation market not captured by these figures is the majority of **permitted development**. This means homeowners undertaking permitted work that does not require a planning application.

Findings from Houzz, which conducted a survey of 1,306 UK homeowners in 2026, found that nearly half of respondents reported renovating their homes, which paints a much more promising picture.

The cost factor

It's worth noting the growing investment that home improvement projects can represent. The latest Houzz & Home Study found that the median UK renovation spend was £20,000 in 2025 – down slightly from £21,440 in 2024, but still higher than the £17,000 reported in 2023.

Of course, the cost of a renovation can vary considerably depending on the property and the work involved. For example, Checkatrade estimates that renovating a whole three-bedroom house could cost between £43,530 and £110,350, with an average of £76,690.

Economic conditions can influence how much homeowners choose to invest – with higher disposable income potentially enabling larger extensions or more ambitious projects, while tighter conditions may lead homeowners to scale back their plans while still improving their homes.



Tom Rowlands | Managing Director
Pure Property Finance

“

Tom Rowlands, Managing Director at Pure Property Finance, added: *Homeowners should consider the full financial implications of a renovation and seek professional financial advice early. Understanding the total costs, affordability and available funding options before committing to a project is essential, as the right finance structure can provide greater certainty and help avoid unnecessary pressure on cash flow.*

”



Are more people moving house?

There are signs that more people are looking to move house in recent years – with [Zoopla reporting in August 2026](#) that there had been 7% more home searches than in the previous year. Overall, there were 5% more homes for sale than a year ago.

Could this signal a shift away from renovation and towards relocation? **Not necessarily.**

Increased interest doesn't mean more people are currently moving house, with agreed sales actually 6% below the previous year. Cost, undeniably, is still a factor – [ONS data](#) puts the average England house price at £293,000 in July 2026, with prices in England up 1.4% year-on-year. These figures are pushed up significantly depending on region.

Average prices in the Southwest were around **£302,000**, while in London they were around **£569,000**. On top of the price tag, buyers face lengthy transaction times and the risk of chain delays or collapses, adding uncertainty to an already stressful process.

So, while the appetite to move may be on the rise, homeowners are continuing to weigh up the costs of renovating versus relocating. With buying a new home representing a significant investment in its own right, the decision to move or improve may increasingly come down to which option makes the most sense for the individual homeowner and their circumstances.

We'll continue to monitor these trends in future editions of the Home Improvement Barometer.

“

Before deciding to move, homeowners should weigh the full cost of moving, from stamp duty to fees and disruption, against what their current home could become. Often the space they need is achievable through an extension or loft conversion, provided the planning groundwork is done properly from the start.

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Dila Gokalp; Director,
Architectural Designer
and Town Planner
at **Homz**



Curious about what your home can do?

Planning Portal's **FREE Householder Insights tool** is designed to help homeowners and buyers understand the planning potential of a property, using its planning history, nearby applications, likely approval outcomes and local planning constraints.

[**Find out more**](#)



Where are homeowners applying?

Home improvement and renovation activity looks very different depending on where you live.

Since 2023, the **South East has seen the highest number of homeowner planning applications, including prior approvals.** That works out at just over 5 applications per 100 homeowners.

London, however, tells another story. Despite having over 16,000 fewer applications over the same period, it has a much higher rate per homeowner – at more than 7 applications per 100 homeowners.

This makes London homeowners the most likely in the country to apply for planning permission for significant changes to their homes.

At the other end of the scale, the North East has seen the lowest number of householder applications since the start of 2023, with 13,295.

In other words, where you live appears to make a real difference to how likely you are to make significant changes to your home – particularly when those changes are large enough to require a planning application.



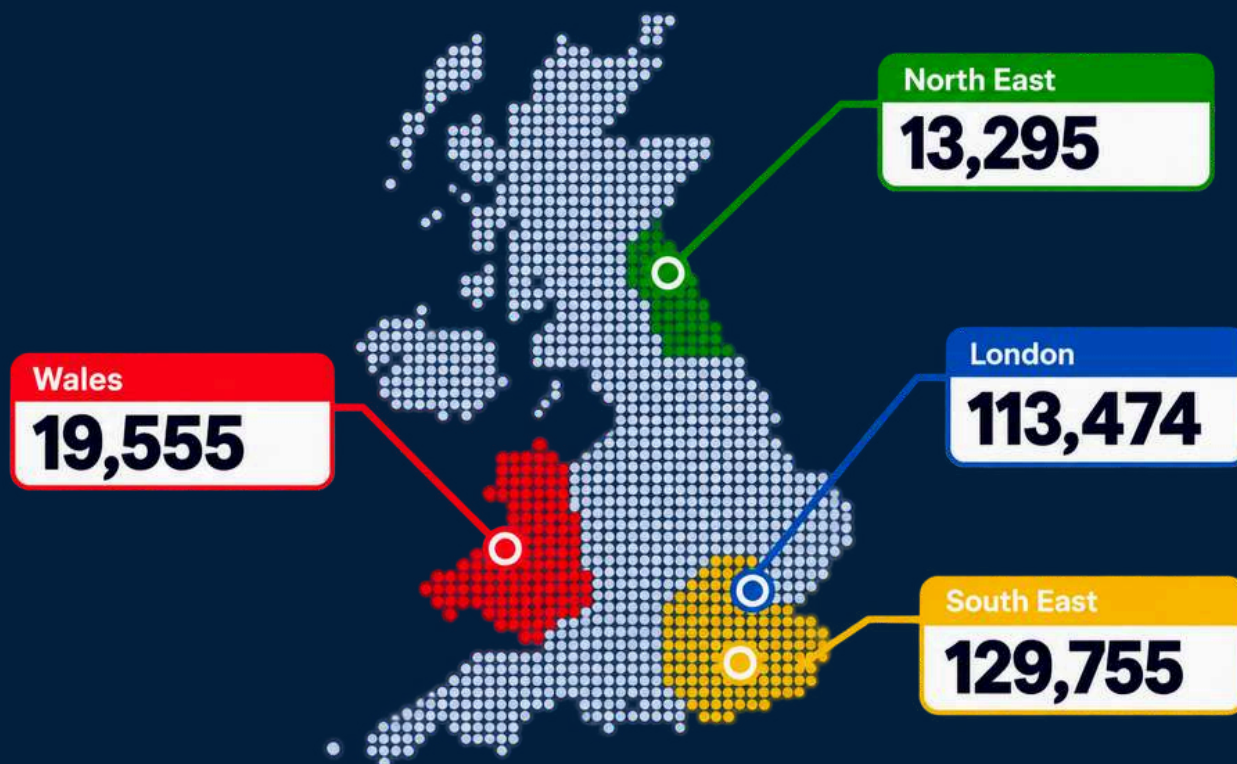
A Planner Explains – John Van Eker

Planning rules vary by property and location – what you can do may depend on local restrictions, conservation areas, listed status and other constraints.

Get advice early – a planning professional can help identify potential issues and whether an idea is likely to require an application.

Regional activity

Householder applications since 2023



London – the city of Larger Home Extensions

London may have the biggest population in England, but it doesn't have the highest number of homeowners. In 2021, the South East, East of England and South West all had more homeowners than the capital. Yet when it comes to home improvement activity, London paints a different picture.

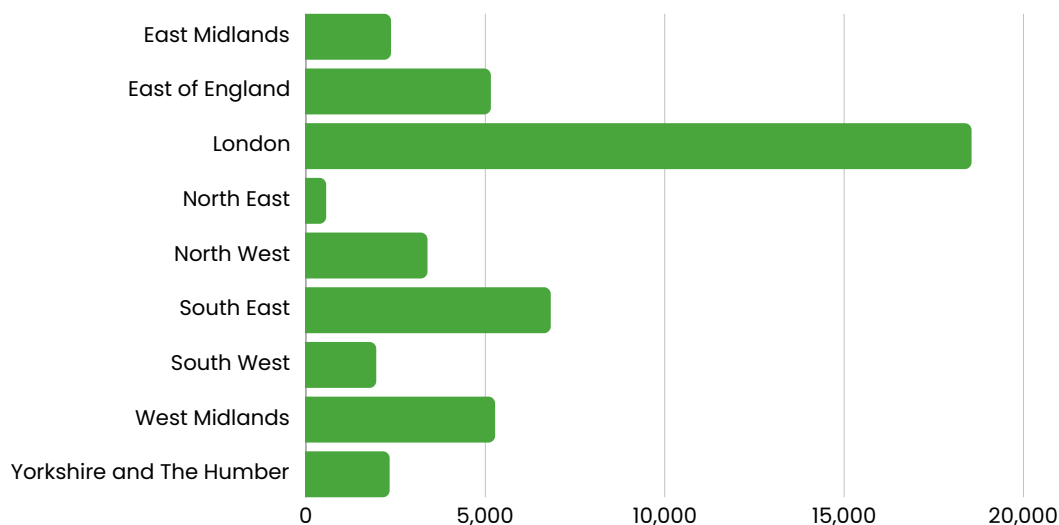
Homeowners in London are more likely than anywhere else in the country to submit householder planning applications, by a notable margin. And London stands out particularly when we look at larger home extensions. The capital has seen 18,552 prior approval applications for larger extensions since 2023 – by some margin, the highest of any region.

The South East comes next, but despite having nearly one million more homeowners, it has recorded **just over a third of London's total number of larger extension applications** over the same period.

So, what is driving London's appetite for bigger home improvements? With space at a premium and moving home remaining a significant financial decision – particularly in the capital, where the average house price is around twice the UK average – extending or adapting an existing property can offer homeowners a way to make better use of the space they already have, while potentially adding value to an already valuable asset.

For many, this could make improving their current home an attractive alternative to taking on the costs and upheaval of moving. **In London, it seems 'improve, don't move' remains very much part of the picture.**

Larger Home Extension Applications



London has seen more than 18,000 larger home extension applications since 2023 – significantly more than any other region.

For homeowners considering a larger project, Brian Berry, Chief Executive of the Federation of Master Builders (FMB), said: "For bigger projects make sure that you have a written contract in place, clear payment milestones, and secure renovation insurance – sometimes home insurance providers cover this. Be aware that larger projects can also present more issues as the project progresses but a good builder, particularly a Master Builder through the FMB, will be prepared for this."

– Brian Berry, Chief Executive of the Federation of Master Builders (FMB)



Larger Home Extensions

A Planner explains

The key to securing permission for a larger extension is showing that the extra space can be delivered without overwhelming the original house or causing an unreasonable impact on neighbours. Councils will consider its height, footprint, roof form and materials, and whether the addition sits comfortably with the character of the street.



They will also look at how much usable garden remains. A site may have room for a large extension, but that does not necessarily mean its full footprint will be acceptable in planning terms.

The relationship with neighbouring homes is often decisive. Homeowners should consider whether the extension would reduce daylight or sunlight, dominate the view from a neighbouring window or garden, or result in overlooking. These issues are particularly important near shared boundaries and existing windows.

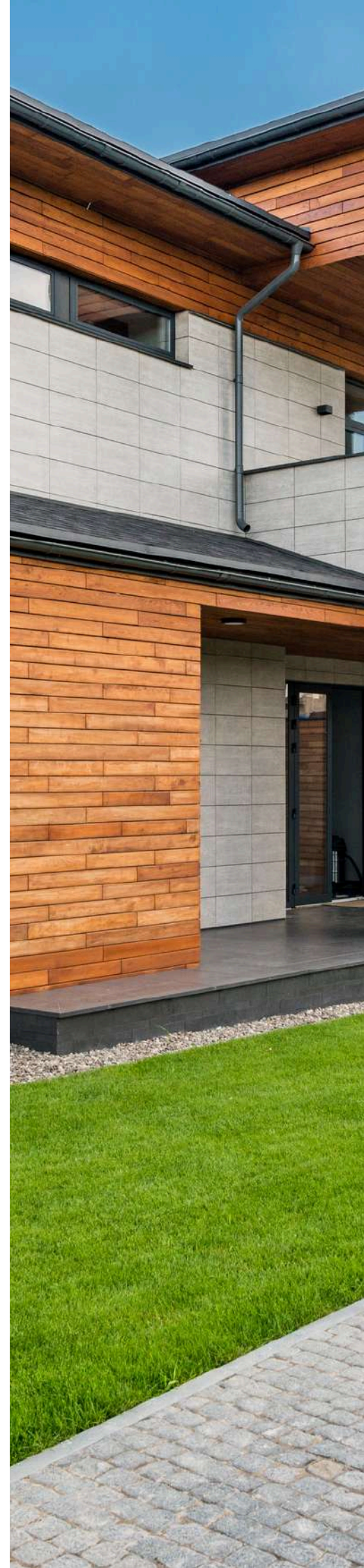
Checking these potential conflicts while the design is still flexible gives homeowners more options: stepping an extension away from a boundary, lowering part of the roof or placing windows more carefully may allow them to gain the space they need while reducing its impact. Accurate drawings showing both the existing house and the proposal will help the council understand how the extension has been designed to fit its setting.

Need accurate, compliant advice for your project? **Ask Navi.**

Our interactive, AI-powered planning assistant lets you ask questions about your project and get guidance and feedback in real time, using natural, conversational language.

Ask Navi draws on authoritative Planning Portal guidance and national planning policy, helping you find clear, trusted information without having to navigate complex planning terminology. An AI-assistant, specifically for accurate planning information.

Ask Navi today





Extending upwards – a niche trend?

Adding space to your home doesn't always mean building out into the garden. If you're looking to create more room, extending upwards with an additional floor can be another option to help you make the most of the space you already have.

Homeowners in the South East have shown the most interest in improving their homes this way – submitting a total of **395 prior approval applications for additional storeys since 2023**. While this does not sound like many, it represents nearly **25% of all prior approval additional storey applications in the data set**.

The next most popular region for extending upwards was London, followed by the East of England. Only 12 prior approval applications for additional storeys were submitted through the Planning Portal in the North East of England during the same period.

Extending upwards remains a relatively niche way of creating extra space – but for homeowners in some parts of the country, it has become an increasingly interesting alternative to extending outwards. For those with limited garden space, adding another floor could offer a way to gain valuable living space while making better use of the home they already have.

Region	Applications to extend upwards
East Midlands	57
East of England	253
London	276
North East	12
North West	179
South East	395
South West	133
West Midlands	172
Yorkshire and The Humber	128



The **South East** have seen the biggest appetite for extending upwards, with **395** prior approval applications for additional stories since 2023.

Extending Upwards

A Planner explains

Building upwards can add space without taking up more garden, but an extra storey changes the height and outline of a house.

Before you start

Homeowners should first establish whether their property qualifies for the **Class AA** permitted development and prior approval route, or whether a full planning application is needed.



Check constraints

Class AA has detailed limits and does not apply to every property, including houses in conservation areas and listed buildings. Checking the route early avoids developing a design around an option that may not be available.

The design should respond to the existing house and the pattern of rooflines along the street. An addition that appears too prominent or disproportionate can be difficult to justify, particularly where neighbouring houses have a consistent height. Homeowners should also look at the proposal from the perspective of nearby homes and gardens.

New upper-floor windows may introduce overlooking, while the increased height can affect neighbours' daylight, sunlight or outlook. Drawings showing the proposed roofline in its street setting can help test these effects before an application is submitted.

An **early structural appraisal** is also important. The existing building and foundations must be capable of supporting the additional floor, and the design will need to meet building regulations, including requirements for stairs, insulation and fire safety.

Considering planning, structure and construction costs

together can give homeowners a more realistic view of what they can build before committing to a design.



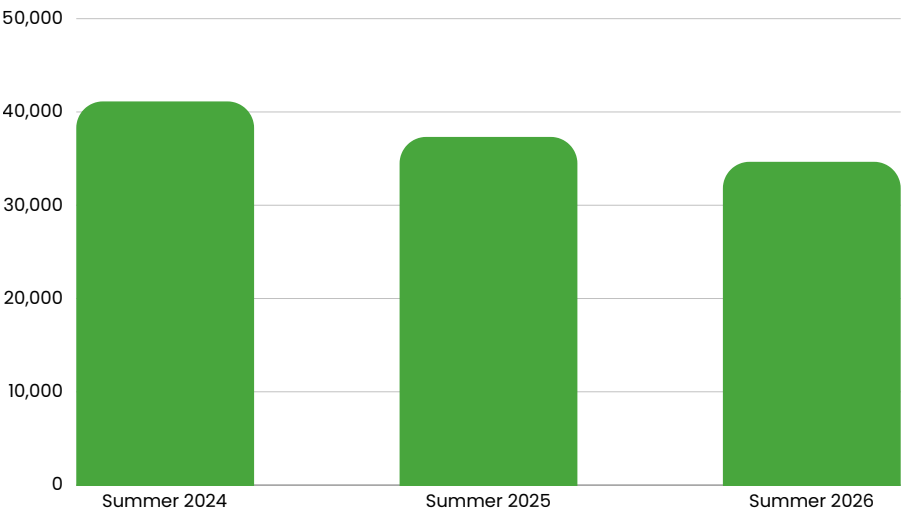


Seasonal planning trends

As it turns out, the changing seasons may have a bigger impact on homeowners’ planning activity than you might expect.

Summer 2026 was an exceptional one for UK weather, becoming the warmest summer on record and bringing three separate heatwaves across the season. With more time outdoors enjoying the good weather, homeowners may have been less inclined to spend time on home improvement admin, contributing to a slight dip in householder planning applications over the summer.

Summer applications since 2023



2026's hot summer may explain the slight dip in householder planning applications during the season

Not all seasons prompt the same homeowner behaviour, however. Historically, **autumn** has been the quietest season for householder applications, so we'll be paying close attention to autumn 2026 to see whether application numbers bounce back or the unusually low levels seen this summer continue.

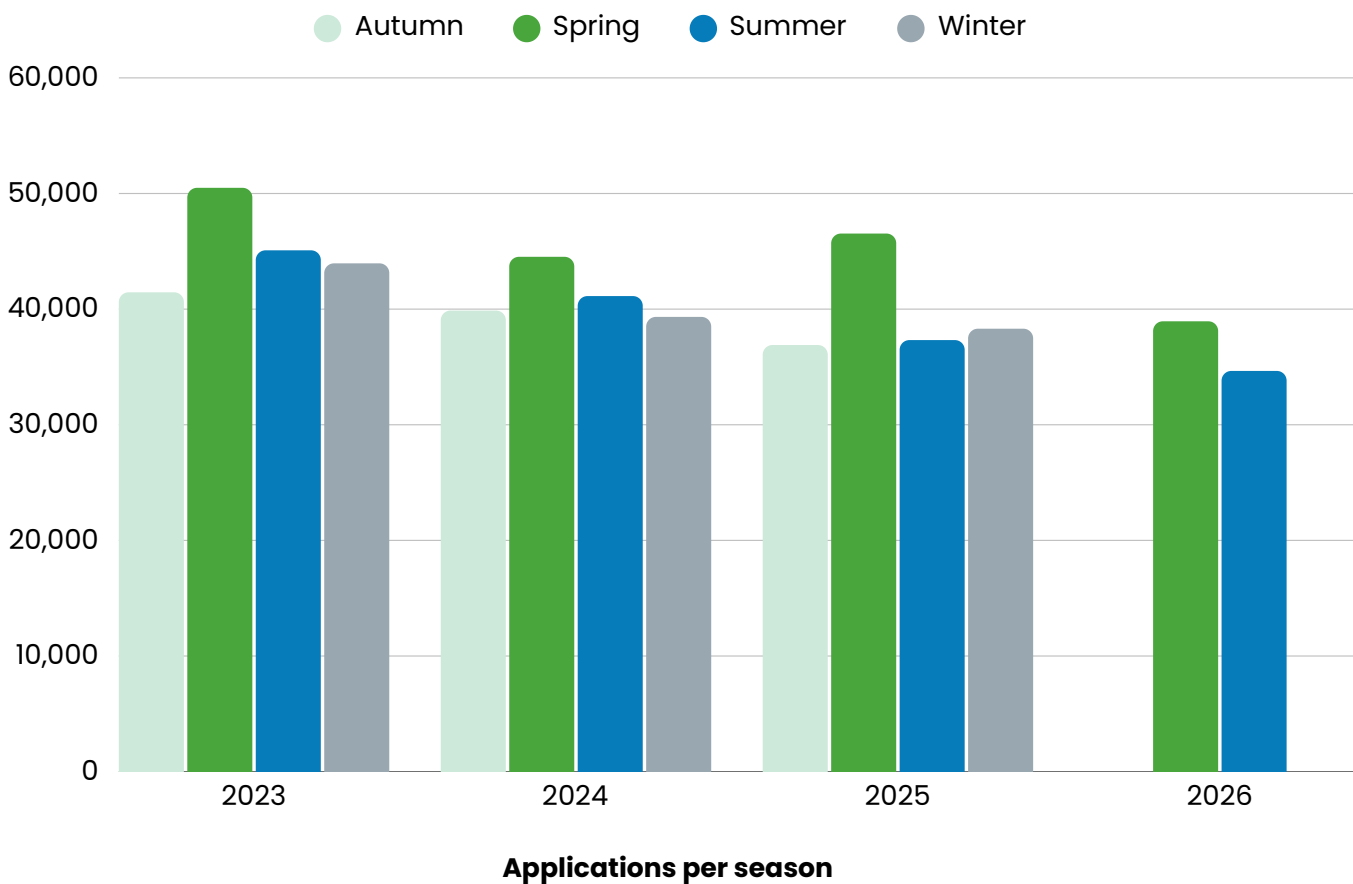
Spring, on the other hand, is the most popular season for home improvement applications – by quite some margin.

Spring – the season of home improvement applications

Spring is the time when homeowners are most ready to get their home improvement plans moving. In 2026, 38,947 householder applications and prior approvals were submitted between March and May – **12% more than in summer.**

It's a pattern we've seen year after year, with spring recording the highest number of applications in every complete year since 2023. From extending a kitchen or creating more living space to making bigger changes to a property, spring appears to be the time when the most homeowners turn their plans into applications.

The same is true for larger home extension projects specifically, with 3,321 applications submitted in Spring 2026 alone – **18% more than in summer.**



Why spring?

Spring, with its sense of fresh starts and renewal, seems like a natural time for homeowners to start thinking about improving their homes. Research from Which? supports this, [finding that early spring](#) is traditionally when online searches for home improvement advice and visits to relevant pages increase.

The change in season may also make it easier to get projects moving. Longer days and warmer weather can make outdoor work, such as extensions and landscaping, more practical. But spring can also be a great time to get the foundations in place: researching options, getting quotes, finding contractors, and navigating planning and building regulations. Starting this process in spring gives homeowners time to get everything lined up, with the aim of getting projects underway over the summer.

Could the new financial year play a part? Spring coincides with the start of the UK tax year, when household budgets and annual financial plans are often reassessed.

For homeowners considering a major project, this may be the point at which an idea becomes a concrete budget and a project plan.

In England, government-set planning application fees increase annually from 1 April, meaning there could also be a small financial incentive for those ready to apply to do so before the new fees take effect.

Is spring the best time to submit an application?

While spring is the busiest time of year for homeowners turning their improvement ideas into planning applications, that doesn't necessarily mean it's the best time to submit. The right timing will depend on your project, how prepared your application is and your own plans.

If you're able to, **getting ahead of the spring rush** could be worth considering. Submitting earlier in the year, when your application is ready, may mean you avoid one of the busiest periods for local authorities and could help you receive a response sooner.

Overall, whether you're planning an extension, loft conversion or another change to your home, taking the time to understand what's required and get your application ready is the most important factor.



Real-time support for your application

Planning Portal is making it easier to prepare and submit your home improvement project with greater confidence. New intelligent tools are built into the application journey to help you understand what's required, spot potential issues and get your application ready before you submit.

From AI-assisted project description refinement and site-specific constraints checks to completeness and readiness checks, these tools are designed to help you catch missing information and common issues earlier – reducing avoidable delays and helping you get your application right first time.

So, whether you're planning an extension, loft conversion or another change to your home, you'll have more support at the point you need it – helping you move from idea to application with greater confidence.

[Find out more](#)





Conclusion

So, is 'improve, don't move' coming to an end?

Homeowners' approach to improving their homes is evolving. While householder planning applications have fluctuated since 2023, the financial commitment involved in major home improvements remains significant. At the same time, growing interest in the housing market, reflected in rising searches and listings, points to homeowners actively considering their options – whether that means improving, moving or planning for the future.

Planning applications only tell part of this story, with permitted development adding a further layer of home improvement activity. And while homeowners may be thinking more carefully about what they can afford, the desire to make better use of the home they already have clearly isn't going anywhere. In some parts of the country, particularly London, significant extensions remain a notable feature of the planning landscape.

Elsewhere, homeowners are finding different ways to create space – including by looking upwards rather than outwards.

Perhaps, then, the story isn't the end of 'improve, don't move', but the end of a particular version of it.

The approach to home improvement may be becoming more considered: making the space people already own work harder, choosing projects carefully, while still investing in bigger projects where they make sense. And when homeowners do decide to move, rising costs mean **the question of whether to improve or relocate is unlikely to have a simple answer.**

That's why the trends behind the applications matter. They offer us a glimpse not just into what homeowners are building, but into how people are responding to changing finances, housing pressures, available space and the practical possibilities of their properties.

This is the first Home Improvement Barometer. As we track the data through the seasons and across the regions, we'll be watching one question particularly closely: **Are Britain's homeowners taking a different approach to home improvement?** The next set of applications may give us the answer.

