

IT'S TIME TO PLAN AHEAD

Looking for big gains? Get planning permission for a conversion before you sell, says Tracey Harrison

MOST people are keen to show their home at its best when putting it up for sale. Slapping a lick of paint on tired old walls, decluttering rooms and placing a few new pot plants in the garden are all well-known tricks to spruce up a property and attract buyers.

But there's another way to both broaden a property's appeal and boost its value, too. Obtaining planning permission for an extension, loft conversion or other major home improvement, without actually carrying out the work, can add 15 per cent or more to the asking price.

This sells the property's potential without the expense of major alterations. For buyers, it delivers an ambitious vision of the home they could have, but allows them to do

the actual work on their own terms and at their own pace.

Getting planning permission isn't suitable for people who need to sell quickly because the process can be time-consuming. It can also be expensive — although it is often a worthwhile investment.

Brian Strickland, for example, is likely to benefit from planning permission for a major project to his £1.45 million, six-bedroom home in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

Plans to replace an existing outdoor cabin and swimming pool with an indoor pool, sauna, steam and games room should increase the property's value to £1.6 million — and he won't have to do the work. 'Planning permission will nearly always add value to a property or parcel of land,' says Brian, 55. He is managing director of land and property development company Sandhurst Newhomes, which specialises in residential developments in the South-East and Home Counties. Joanna and Mike Power also increased the value of their home,

Woodpecker Cottage, in Warren Row, near Tyrford, Berkshire, by getting planning permission for a major overhaul. The plans have boosted the value of their home from £850,000 to £1.1 million.

A substantial home, surrounded by protected woodland, Woodpecker Cottage was a bit of a rabbit warren, with three downstairs bedrooms. But the Powers called in Alchemy, a firm specialising in adding value to properties.

Managing director Barbara Richardson oversaw a thorough decluttering and masterminded plans for an extension to incorporate large, bright new reception rooms for the ground floor and six bedrooms, plus six bathrooms, upstairs. And, a new double garage and a swimming pool outside. They have now found a buyer.

'We're delighted,' says Joanna, 63. 'We were able to show potential buyers the house as it could be without having to do the work.' Barbara, a chartered surveyor, adds: 'You have to look at the ways

you can maximise a home's potential value and, certainly with larger properties, permission for major changes is a good way to do this.'

So what needs planning permission? This is a complex area and checking with the local authority is vital, but many extensions, roof alterations and outbuilding conversions will have to go before the planners. The system is supposed to be getting easier under new Government proposals however, and small-scale extensions may be made exempt.

But significant schemes will still need the nod, a process which takes eight weeks or more. And it's advisable to employ a planning consultant and an architect for large schemes.

Estate agents agree that getting planning permission can add value to the right sort of house. 'It works for properties which perhaps aren't eminently saleable,' says Tony Jamieson, senior partner of Surrey-based Clarke Gannon Weillers. 'You can draw up plans for fairly radical alterations and show poten-



Big ideas: Brian's house has risen from £1.45 million to £1.6 million

tial buyers what they might not be able to imagine otherwise. This can add 10-15 per cent to the value.

'The alternative is to have prepared the drawings only. This is cheaper for the vendor but then the buyer will have to incur the planning permission costs,' he adds.

Gaining planning permission is a worthwhile investment, according to Louisa Fletcher, founder of the website propertypriceadvice.co.uk. 'For a small house, with limited outside space, there's no real advantage — and don't forget that the process can be costly and time-consuming,' she says.

'But a Victorian or Edwardian house with a big back garden certainly has potential.'

■ **ALCHEMY** (01628 474 301, alchemy.me.uk); **SANDHURST NEIGHOMES** (01702 338 816, sandhurstnewhomes.com).