

Park a new room in your garage

FORGET conservatories and loft conversions — the latest way to improve your home and increase its long-term value is to turn the garage into extra living space.

Canry homeowners are clearing out decades of junk to create luxury lounges, bedrooms, mini-cinemas, fitness centres and even fully-equipped offices.

estate agents claim the changes will make their properties more attractive to buyers and add about 10 per cent to the selling price. How-

ever the work will need to be finished to a high standard to reap these rewards, warns Ian Davis, director-general of the Federation of Master Builders.

"A conversion may give extra living space, but check it will be fit to live in," he says. "Garages are not designed as habitable space, so you will almost certainly have to upgrade the structure to meet building regulations covering energy efficiency, damp-proofing and ventilation."

The first step is to decide what you want to

create. Do you need an extra bedroom or a playroom for the children? Are you lacking space when all the family congregates?

You also have to decide how to pay for the work. If you need to borrow, what are the options?

"It depends on how quickly you intend pay back the cash," says Richard Mason, director of MoneySupermarket.com. "If you need it for only a year, go for a credit card which offers an introductory interest-free period." Also worth considering are unse-

cured loans, which cost about 5.7 per cent at present. If you are on your lender's standard variable rate, it may pay to remortgage and add the sum required for the building work to the total.

Once your money question is settled you will need to draw up plans, or pay an architect to do so, for submission to the local council's planners before the project can start.

At the very least you will need building regulation consent — possibly even planning permission — depending on the scale of the work. Failure to do so could result in you being forced to restore everything to its original state.

Once the red tape has been sorted out, there are three options. If you are a handyman and the changes are not too onerous, you might carry out the work yourself, cutting the overall costs dramatically.

MOST people, however, call in the professionals — builders who do a variety of jobs, or companies which specialise in this type of work.

Phil Bateman thinks the combination of more people working from home and a demand for extra room in compact modern houses will lead to a boom in the sector.

"Garage alterations will become the most popular way of creating extra space in your house, ahead of building conservatories and extensions," adds Phil, managing director of the Garage Conversion Company which has franchised operations across the UK and has already completed more than 900 projects.

Regardless of which route you choose, there are a number of things to look out for to ensure the work goes smoothly, says Steve Bushell, a director of the London-based home improvement group Uring.com.

"A good builder will give a reasonably detailed quote and an outline of how long the work is likely to take," he says. "But it's advisable to set a realistic budget and have a safety net of up to 15 per cent to cover any unforeseen expenses."

"It's also worth having a word with your neighbours before work starts to keep them inside."

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MORE SCOPE: Barry and Susan show off what used to be their garage

Junk makes way for bay window delight

WHEN Susan and Barry Hemmings decided they needed more space they converted the garage — and created two extra rooms.

The couple, from Ampthill, Bedfordshire, paid the Garage Conversion Company about £10,500 to give them a dining-room with a bay window and a utility room.

"We had been thinking about having the work done for years — it was ridiculous that the garage was full of junk while we were having to use the best part of the lounge as a dining-room," says Susan, 54, an

assistant customer services manager. Susan has no qualms about leaving the family cars — she has a Ford Fiesta while warehouseman Barry drives a BMW — on the drive and believes the alterations will boost the appeal of their £200,000, three-bedroom detached property.

"They don't make garages wide enough for modern cars, so most people leave them outside," adds Susan. "It's been worth having the work done and it was really nice to have the extra space when the family came at Christmas."

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