

Moving for an extra room can cost £60,000 – evicting the car can be a far cheaper option

You can join the garage handwagon

If you need more space and you can't or don't want to move, there are various options. The most obvious is a one or two-storey back extension, but some planners now approach these with all the enthusiasm of a three-year-old presented with a plate of broccoli.

Another less contentious plan might be to go up into the loft or down into the basement. Still, these can be costly and you'll be covered in dust for months. Probably the easiest, cheapest and quickest idea is a garage conversion. You need to have a garage, of course, but it doesn't have to be attached. Detached garages are perfectly convertible.

But detached or otherwise, the process is not red-tape free. As Gary Hibell, of Garages 2 Rooms (www.garages2rooms.co.uk, 0800 077 6312), says: 'There may be a covenant on the property requiring the garage to be used to park a car.'

On older properties, these covenants may no longer apply. If your home is covenanted, you can apply for change of use.

Broadly speaking, excluding conservation areas and listed properties, most garage conversions are allowable under Permitted Development. You won't need planning permission. That said, if you want to swap the garage door for a window, you may be asked to submit architect's drawings and since architects only have to breathe out for their cash meter to run, costs can soon escalate.

Garage conversions are covered by

Lowri Turner's Home Improvements



building regulations, so there are tight controls over what materials are used, the kind of windows you put in and things such as heat loss. The work will have to be inspected and signed off with a certificate.

Still, next to other extensions, garage conversions are very cost-effective. A basic conversion costs £5,000 to £7,000 but you should allow £10,000 with the electrics and plumbing. For that, you get ten to 20 per cent more living space.

As Hibell says: 'To move from a three-bedroom to a four-bedroom home in the same area where your kids are settled at school can cost an extra £60,000. A garage conversion comes in at the same cost as the stamp duty.'

And let's face it, how many people actually use their garages for cars these days? 'You can put your BMW in your garage, but you can't open the doors,' says John Hill, of The Garage Conversion Company (www.garageconversion.com, 0800 587 0262). 'The average car is treated now and doesn't need to be kept in a garage anyway.'

Most people use their garages to

store junk. But once converted, they can become kitchens, dining rooms, playrooms or offices.

'More of us are working from home and some companies will even fund the work as it's cheaper to have people working from home,' Hill says.

The nuts and bolts of the building process are pretty simple. Garages tend to be cold, damp places, so you need to deal with that by tanking the area and insulating it well.

Plus, to prevent petrol spills running towards the house, many garage floors slope and need to be levelled. A PVC membrane is put on the existing concrete floor to keep out damp, followed by a layer of kiln-dried sand to level it and then a high-density foam compound for insulation. Floorboards or floor coverings are put down next.



TWICE AS NICE: Anabelle Svedberg in her kitchen, one of two garage conversions at her Chelsea mews house, left



Anabelle Svedberg and her first husband bought their four-bedroom mews house in Chelsea (for sale at £1.8million through John D Wood, 020 7352 1484) in 1977. As the family grew, they bought the garage next door and converted it into a kitchen, then converted their own garage into a bedsit for a nanny for Freya, now 15, and Theo, 13.

Because the house is in a conser-

vation area, Anabelle, 55, a lawyer, didn't bother to remove the door and put in new windows.

'I knew I would not get planning permission and I think houses look better if you keep their traditional impact,' she says.

From the outside, the building is unchanged. Inside, though, both garages have been transformed. 'You just don't think of either as a garage any more,' Anabelle says. They have also transformed life for the family.

'Without them, we couldn't have lived here for almost 30 years,' she adds.

