

Planning Permission (Electrical)

Planning permission is not generally required for installing or replacing electrical circuits. However, if you live in a listed building you are advised to contact your Local Planning Authority before carrying out any work.

Building Regulations (Electrical)

If you are carrying out electrical work in your home or garden in England and Wales, you will have to follow new rules in the Building Regulations.

You should use an installer who is registered with a competent person scheme to seek approval from a Building Control body. This is true for most work. However, you do not need to tell them about repairs, replacements and maintenance work or extra power points or lighting points or other alterations to existing circuits (except in a kitchen or bathroom, or outdoors).

Electrical circuits

The Building Regulations set out overall criteria and requirements to ensure electrical safety. Approved Document P provides further practical guidance for undertaking this type of work. You should bear in mind that any electrical work you carry out within your home, garden, garage shed and other storage buildings may need to comply with the requirements of the Building Regulations. If you are unsure about whether you are required to comply you may wish to contact your local authorities building regulations department.

All electrical work should follow the safety standards in BS 7671 (the 'wiring regulations') which can be found on the British Standards Institute (BSI) website.

These rules have been introduced to help reduce the number of deaths, injuries and fires caused by faulty installations.

The Building Regulations only set standards for electrical installation work in relation to dwellings (houses, flats etc). If the work is carried out in industrial or commercial buildings it is covered by the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is responsible for making sure that electrical installation work in these kinds of buildings is safe and if you have any queries about work in these buildings you should contact HSE.

The Building Regulations do not restrict who may carry out electrical installation work. If you want to do the work yourself you should make sure that you know what you need to do before starting any works. There are a number of reputable guides that you can use to help you.

The Building Regulations do not set standards for the safety of electrical appliances but they do require that fixed connections of appliances are safe.

Checking for safety

Where the works require a Building Regulations application it should be checked to make sure that it is safe. This checking can be done in either of two ways:

- by using an electrician registered with a competent person scheme
- or by notifying the building control section of your local authority.

Local Authority Building Control

You should make a Building Regulations application to Building Control if the electrician you employ to carry out the works is not registered as a competent person under the schemes mentioned below or if you do the work yourself. You should contact your local authority building control department before you start the work. They will explain the requisite procedures to you.

It is also best to discuss with Building Control how they wish to inspect and check the works you are carrying out.

Approved inspector building control

An approved inspector is a body which carries out the same functions as local authority building control. If you use an approved inspector they will explain to you how the approved inspector system works. If at the end of the work the approved inspector is satisfied that the work is safe, you will be given a copy of the final notice

Competent Person Schemes

In relation to electrical safety this means that an electrician who is registered by an organisation authorised by the Secretary of State and is able to certify the work carried out is safe, without you having to notify Building Control. Once works are complete the electrician will arrange for you to receive a building regulations compliance certificate within 30 days of the completion of the work. Your local authority will then also be notified about the work by the electrician.

The competent person should also provide you with a completed Electrical Installation Certificate which shows that the work was tested for safety.

Minor works - Electrical

The Building Regulations allow certain works (known as non-notifiable or minor work) to be carried out without having to notify building control or using a registered electrician. Such work includes:

- Replacing any electrical fitting (for example, socket outlets, light fittings, control switches)
- Adding a fused spur (which is a socket that has a fuse and a switch that is connected to an appliance eg, heater) to an existing circuit (but not in a kitchen, bathroom or outdoors)
- Any repair or maintenance work
- Installing or upgrading main or supplementary equipotential bonding
- Installing cabling at extra low voltage for signalling, cabling or communication purposes (for example, telephone cabling, cabling for fire alarm or burglar alarm systems, or heating control systems).

If you are not sure whether the work you want to undertake is notifiable, you should contact your local authority building control department for advice.

Minor electrical work can also present a risk to safety. If qualified electricians carry out the work they should give you a Minor Works Certificate which means that they have tested to work to make sure it is safe. If you do the work yourself you may wish to engage a qualified electrician to check it for you.

Planning Permission – Outbuildings

Rules governing outbuildings apply to sheds, greenhouses and garages as well as other ancillary garden buildings such as swimming pools, ponds, sauna cabins, kennels, enclosures (including tennis courts) and many other kinds of structure for a purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse.

Other rules relate to the installation of a satellite dish, the erection of a new dwelling or the erection or provision of fuel storage tanks.

Under new regulations that came into effect on 1 October 2008 outbuildings are considered to be permitted development, not needing planning permission, subject to the following limits and conditions:

- No outbuilding on land forward of a wall forming the principal elevation.
- Outbuildings and garages to be single storey with maximum eaves height of 2.5 metres and maximum overall height of four metres with a dual pitched roof or three metres for any other roof.
- Maximum height of 2.5 metres in the case of a building, enclosure or container within two metres of a boundary of the curtilage of the dwellinghouse.
- No verandas, balconies or raised platforms.
- No more than half the area of land around the "original house"* would be covered by additions or other buildings.
- In National Parks, the Broads, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and World Heritage Sites the maximum area to be covered by buildings, enclosures, containers and pools more than 20 metres from house to be limited to 10 square metres.
- On designated land* buildings, enclosures, containers and pools at the side of properties will require planning permission.
- Within the curtilage of listed buildings any outbuilding will require planning permission.

*The term "original house" means the house as it was first built or as it stood on 1 July 1948 (if it was built before that date). Although you may not have built an extension to the house, a previous owner may have done so.

*Designated land includes national parks and the Broads, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, conservation areas and World Heritage Sites.

Please note: the permitted development allowances described here apply to houses not flats, maisonettes or other buildings.

Building Regulations - Outbuildings

If you want to put up small detached buildings such as a garden shed or summerhouse in your garden, building regulations will not normally apply if the floor area of the building is less than 15 square metres and contains NO sleeping accommodation.

If the floor area of the building is between 15 square metres and 30 square metres, you will not normally be required to apply for building regulations approval providing that the building contains NO sleeping accommodation and is either at least one metre from any boundary or it is constructed of substantially non-combustible materials.



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Planning Permission – Working from Home

You do not necessarily need planning permission to work from home. The key test is whether the overall character of the dwelling will change as a result of the business.

If the answer to any of the following questions is 'yes', then permission will probably be needed:

- Will your home no longer be used mainly as a private residence?
- Will your business result in a marked rise in traffic or people calling?
- Will your business involve any activities unusual in a residential area?
- Will your business disturb your neighbours at unreasonable hours or create other forms of nuisance such as noise or smells?

Whatever business you carry out from your home, whether it involves using part of it as a bed-sit or for 'bed and breakfast' accommodation, using a room as your personal office, providing a childminding service, for hairdressing, dressmaking or music teaching, or using buildings in the garden for repairing cars or storing goods connected with a business - the key test is: is it still mainly a home or has it become business premises?

If you are in doubt you may apply to your council for a Certificate of Lawful Use for the proposed activity, to confirm it is not a change of use and still the lawful use.