AS Unit 1: Our Built Environment

2.1.9: CHANGE OF USE

Key terms

Term	Definition
Alteration	Works required to effect a change of use and accommodate new functions.
Refurbishment	The process of improvement by cleaning, decorating, repairing and re-equipping, and of making a building more energy efficient and sustainable.
Extension	New construction to increase the floor space of an existing building.
Permitted Development	Generally minor changes to existing properties that do not require approval from the local planning authority.

CHANGE OF USE

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order categorises uses of land and buildings. Developments may not be used for purposes that are not within the use class for which they received planning permission.

The main use classes are:

A: Shops and other retail

B: Commercial and industrial

C: Residential

D: Assembly and leisure.

Planning permission is generally not needed to change the use of a development when the existing and proposed use are within the same class, such as from a DIY store to a charity shop. Changing the use of a building from one class to another may be considered as permitted development, otherwise the change will require planning permission.

ALTERING EXISTING BUILDINGS

Planning Permission: Some alterations may require planning permission, while some may be considered 'permitted development', such as installing new external doors and window openings. The local planning authority will confirm if planning permission is needed.

Building Regulations apply to alteration work, such as structural alterations, window replacement, insulation and other work associated with the conservation of fuel and power. The regulations may also apply if the use of a building is changed, particularly regulations concerning fire resistance, protections and means of escape.

REFURBISHING EXISTING BUILDINGS

Building Regulations: All structural work – such as replacing damaged timber beams with steel or upgrading floors to suit increased loadings – will require engineering design and approval.

Services: Replacement of electrical and heating systems and may involve some space requirements for equipment, such as HVAC plant.

Asbestos: The use of all types of asbestos in buildings was banned in the UK in 1999. It is often found in existing buildings, and if disturbed the resulting asbestos particles can kill. All asbestos products discovered during refurbishment should be removed and disposed of by specialists.

EXTENDING EXISTING BUILDINGS

Approvals: All but small domestic extensions will require detailed planning permission and will be subject to building regulation control. Coordination of floor levels and increased demands on electrical and heating systems and drainage installations must also be considered.

COMPATIBILITY

Here are some issues that may arise when working with existing buildings:

Dimensions: Circa 1970, the UK construction industry adopted the SI system of metric measurement. Before then, building products were produced to imperial measurements and problems may arise when selecting materials for repairs or extensions; e.g. imperial facing bricks are bigger than metric bricks, making it difficult to course/bond between old and new brickwork without using salvaged or purpose made bricks.

Construction methods: Older buildings are likely to be solid structures. Extending these buildings, particularly when a different structural system, such as a frame, is to be used, requires careful attention and due allowance for differential movements between the structures and weatherproofing finishes.

Matching materials may also present difficulties where existing materials have weathered, or where the original products are no longer available.

PRE-1919 BUILDINGS

Conservation: Heritage and traditional methods of construction are important in the maintenance and renovation of the historic built environment, where it may be necessary to comply with planning regulations for listed buildings and conservation areas intended to preserve the history and character of older buildings for the benefit of present and future generations.

Maintaining these buildings will involve matching existing materials and methods of construction whilst retaining as much of the original fabric as possible.