

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Q My new neighbour has cut down two mature trees on our boundary, and intends to concrete over his front garden and erect a second garage next to the one he already has. He has no planning consent for this. Several of us have contacted the East Riding of Yorkshire planning enforcement team. They have effectively said that he can build it and seek retrospective consent, which will most likely be granted.

Is it really the case that someone doing things by the book and putting in a planning application generates a letter from the council to their neighbours seeking objections, whereas someone who doesn't can build what he likes? Surely there is little point in having an enforcement team if adherence to the planning laws appears optional?

LW, East Yorkshire

A Householders have the ability to add extensions and make changes to their dwellings within certain defined limits by using permitted development rights (see planningportal.gov.uk), meaning planning permission is not required. These rights apply to an outbuilding if it meets all of these conditions: the extension does not cover more than 50% of the land around a house (any existing outbuildings have to be included in the calculations); the extension is single-storey, with a maximum ridge height of 4 metres for a pitched roof or 3 metres for any other kind; the eaves height is no more than 2.5 metres; an outbuilding closer than 2 metres to the boundary

is no higher than 2.5 metres; and it is not forward of the original dwelling. If the garage does not fall within permitted development rights, then the council has discretion about enforcement action. You should encourage the other neighbours to contact the council; some are more inclined to take action if many people complain. If that fails, you could complain to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Before serving an enforcement notice, the council would first suggest that the owner apply for retrospective planning permission. The fact that the garage had already been built would not influence their decision. Neighbours must still be consulted in this instance, so we would advise you to object in writing at that point. A final approach would be to check your title for restrictive covenants that might prevent the garage being constructed. Legal advice would be required to check whether such covenants are enforceable.

As regards the new hard standing, planning permission is not needed if a new or replacement driveway uses permeable surfacing, which allows water to drain through, or if the runoff is directed to a lawn or border to drain naturally. If the surface is more than 5 sq metres, consent will be needed for laying traditional impermeable driveways that do not provide drainage. Again, if permission is required and has not been sought, you can ask the council to take enforcement action.

Jennifer Roe is an associate at Russell-Cooke Solicitors; russell-cooke.co.uk

Q My neighbour is a hoarder. His house is full of junk. Should I report him to social services? It would damage relations, but he needs help.

WE, Surrey

A As with many psychological conditions, the symptoms of Hoarding Disorder (HD) are exhibited behaviourally. A person with HD has difficulty discarding or parting with personal possessions, regardless of their actual value, because there is a perceived need to save the items and distress associated with throwing them out. Space becomes unusable in the way it should be used, such as sleeping on a bed, using the loo or cooking in the kitchen.

Some sufferers may recognise and acknowledge that they have a problem; others may not. While it may seem that the best solution is to 'get rid of the stuff', this isn't really what is helpful. In 2014, the Care Act recognised self-neglect, which includes hoarding. It recommends that people who are dealing with substantial hoarding issues should be referred to local Safeguarding Adult Boards

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(SABs). To be frank, this action may not result in your neighbour getting the support he may need. This is not because social services do not want to help, but because there are limited resources. What often happens is a 'quick fix' focus on removal of items, instead of a holistic intervention. Because this is only a superficial intervention, the outcome can be that the person re-engages in hoarding behaviour, which can lead to eviction.

HoardingUK is a national not-for-profit organisation that works to find ways to prevent forced clearance and eviction. It will send you a letter and a leaflet that you can deliver anonymously to your neighbour. We do not ask for information about the person; instead, we invite them to contact us and join a path that is person-centred and empowering – psychological support, skills development, behavioural change and personal growth. The helpline is free, but HUK charges for its one-to-one support model. For more details, email info@hoardinguk.org.

Megan Karnes, director, hoardinguk.org

Q In the past month, I have come across a few insects that I have identified as larder beetles. There have been a dozen of them, dotted around in different rooms. What has caused them to come in, and how do I get rid of them? The internet suggested insecticide, but I don't want to use that in the kitchen.

Frances Farrant, via email

A Larder beetles (*Dermestes* species) are common domestic insects that often breed in food scraps under the cooker, behind the fridge or in the larder. They fly readily to find new food sources, so you may be discovering the adventurous ones. They will scavenge almost any foodstuff, but a clue is in the word larder, which was originally a meat (and land) store, rather than the pantry (from the French pain, for bread). Before humans stored food, the beetles were carrion-feeders, moving in at the dry sinew stage after the fly maggots had finished. Because of this, they can breed in dead mice behind skirting boards, or dead birds in the attic. You must find the source, whether in the kitchen or the roof void.

The bristly pale grey/brown larvae, 3-15 mm long, scuttle along with a distinctive sinuous gait. Deep cleaning is the only way to get rid of them, so after checking for damaged and leaking food packaging in the cupboards, pull out the fridge, the cooker, the washing machine and other appliances, and mop up every crumb. If it's any consolation, when I moved into my house 17 years ago, there were thousands of them under the kitchen carpet. They may have been eating the festering matting, which was impregnated with spillages.

Richard Jones is the author of House Guests, House Pests (Bloomsbury £9.99); bugman@richardjones.com

Q We bought some lovely wide-rimmed glasses at John Lewis seven years ago, but some of them soon started to become cloudy. We've tried in vain to sort it out, and now use them only for creamy desserts. How can we get them clear and sparkling again?

Paul Ross, Cheltenham

A A good trick for cloudy glasses is to mix up baking soda and white vinegar. The acidity of the vinegar combined with the baking soda makes this a dream cleaning solution. Add a tablespoon or more of baking soda to warm water in a washing-up bowl, pour in some vinegar and let the fizz do the work.

Steven Zockal is the director of 0800 HANDYMAN; 0800handyman.co.uk

TOP TIPS

Having flowers in the house is uplifting, but pollen stains are notoriously hard to remove from clothing. Here's how to tackle them.

■ The key is to make sure the powdery pollen doesn't get rubbed into your clothes' fibres – whatever you do, don't scrub or wet the stain. Instead, wrap sticky tape around your fingers and gently pat the affected area, or remove the pollen using your vacuum cleaner's crevice nozzle.

■ For cotton and wool, all you need to do after the sticky-tape

treatment is machine-wash the item at as high a temperature as the fabric allows, using the appropriate programme.

■ For silk, pat with sticky tape, then spot-treat any remaining traces of pollen with Stain Devils mud, grass and make-up remover make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions. After this, machine-wash the clothes at 30C on the delicates cycle.

■ goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute



Home help

If you have a household problem, whether it's hungry beetles or a neighbour's building plans, our experts are here to offer advice



Illustration: David Hurn