

# The Architect's Column

**Nick Belderbos**, Chartered RIBA Architect and Director of Heswall based [architects-direct.com](http://architects-direct.com), answers your questions and offers advice.

## Semi-independent living

**Q.** We are considering extending our property in order to cater for an aging parent. We would like to provide some accommodation that will offer the security of living with us while at the same time independence for everyone. Will dividing the house have an impact on the property's selling potential?

**A.** Development of domestic properties changed very slowly in the period before the industrial revolution. Since then society has changed rapidly and there have been major modifications to the properties we live in.

We are currently noticing two significant influences on the way domestic properties are being modified / designed and the works people want to carry out:

1. The aging population.
2. The current economic climate

### The aging population

Caring for our relatives as they get old is currently very topical and, where possible, this is proving to be an attractive option within many families.

We are therefore noticing that clients are asking to modify their properties in order to provide a degree of independent living within the property for their elderly parents while also giving them the security of being close by.

In order to ensure that the property cannot be divided and sold separately, planning policy could prevent complete separation of the property. Shared spaces such as a utility that links the independent accommodation to the main property may overcome this. Many people will want this accommodation to be as independent as possible, possibly with its own external door and stairs, if it is created on two stories.

It may be preferable to provide the accommodation on the ground floor only and this has two benefits. It avoids negotiating stairs and also reduces the level of alteration if the property was to be converted back into a complete house in the future.

I understand your concerns regarding the selling potential of a property with two quite separate elements created for very specific purposes. While this is a question that is worth asking an estate agent, the influence of the current economic climate may also help answer your query.

### The Property Ladder

For young people to get onto the property ladder is difficult in the current climate. This results in a move toward renting rather than buying, a situation that has existed in many European countries for some time. It has also resulted in many young people returning home after university or staying at home longer once they start work.

A form of independent accommodation would enable young people to stay at home and save money while at the same time provide independence from their parents.

### The home office

Since 2008 there has been a marked increase in the number of people working from home. This is influenced by the economic climate and improvements in technology and is likely to be an increasing trend in the future.

Some form of self-contained accommodation within a domestic property would be an ideal space for use as a home office.

In summary, if you are looking to extend your property you should not only look at the short-term benefits but also how the accommodation can be adapted in the future for a variety of uses. Ensure that you maintain flexibility for future use by yourself or a potential buyer. Flexibility is always the key and 'granny flat' accommodation has the potential to appeal to a wider spectrum of society than it did in the past.



### 'Granny flat' accommodation

A two-storey extension providing independent 'granny' accommodation on the ground floor with an additional bedroom over for the main house.



### Graduate accommodation

A simple modification to the 'Granny flat' and the addition of a staircase provides independent accommodation for children returning from University or starting work. The bedroom is located in the first floor of the extension.



### Home office

Removal of a stud wall creates a home office independent from the existing house

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