

## INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

# Summer houses – an option for 'year round' homeworking

*With COVID-19 restrictions continuing to be part of everyday life, thousands of employees have remained working from home. During the first lockdown back in March many of us were operating from a corner of the living room, the kitchen table or the spare bedroom but as restrictions have continued, home working has*

*become increasingly sophisticated. With more people looking to create a dedicated work space at home, building a 'summer house' separate from the main residence is becoming a popular option. So what opportunities does this create for mortgage intermediaries?*

## GROWTH IN HOMEWORKING

Official figures show exclusive remote working hit a high of 38% in mid-June\*, though the statistics were only collected from the middle of May, so miss out nearly two months of lockdown and could have been higher. As uncertain times continue, employees are now facing further months of working from home as the pandemic grows again in intensity.

## HOME OFFICES - PART OF THE NEW NORMAL

A poll from the Home Builders Federation has stated that 40% of people say that they would now prioritise space for a home office if they were searching for a new home. The figures come as no surprise as employees look to make their home working environment as user friendly and comfortable as possible. Pandemic restrictions may continue for some time to come, so working from home could not only be the enforced way of working, but also the preferred option for those who have now sampled the benefits.

## HOW HAVE WE ADAPTED?

In articles like this I often give a case study example - perhaps from a Harpenden Building Society customer or from someone in our community. I didn't have to go far this time as both myself and Jean Errington, one of our Business Development Managers, have first-hand experience of creating our own dedicated 'office space' following lockdown.

We've both gone down the route of creating a 'Summer House' at the end of our gardens. Not only do they provide extended leisure space for entertaining and the like, they also provide that valuable 'Home Office' so much appreciated during these COVID-19 times. It's a good option if it's not possible to extend the main residence.





## SUMMER HOUSE OPTIONS

Summer houses start from a base price of approximately £2000 and can easily rise to 5 figures plus. Like any development project, cost is dependent on the building spec you go for and if cash isn't available to fund it, a mortgage option provided by a specialist lender like Harpenden Building Society can help facilitate the build. As a society we fund the larger scale, extensive summer house developments costing in excess of £75K.

Jean opted for a summer house measuring 8 feet x 8 feet guided by the plot size available to her. Not only has it given her family extra leisure space, it has also given her the opportunity to work from home completely uninterrupted.

Jean explains: "I've mainly used the summer house as an office so far, but we are searching for some armchairs and further additions that would fit in so we can use it as our relaxation space too. The construction took half a day by the fitting team. My husband is practical and had laid the base so all they had to do was assemble it, as it arrived in kit form. He has also connected the electricity and we have a Wi-Fi booster to give us signal at this end of the garden, which is approx. 80 feet from the back of the house."

"The size and type of summer house I have installed does not require planning permission but it's important to check when considering your own option. The sky is the limit with these structures when it comes to fitting them out and how much people are willing to spend on them!"

My own summer house is rectangle in shape and again designed to make best use of the garden space available. This new structure has brought many benefits during these lockdowns times and will continue to do so when this is all over. During the day I work here, and then in the evening the kids, or we all as a family, use it to relax. I anticipate the children (2 x 16 year olds) taking it over more in the evenings going forward!

The concrete base took a day to set, the 'summer house' 2 days to construct and a further 2 days to paint. In less than a week everything was installed. We didn't have to move to gain extra space or put up with the mess and inconvenience of a building site in the house.

## TOP TIPS

Through my own experience I have some tips to pass on. Firstly – ensure you finance the project in the most efficient way. At Harpenden we'd be pleased to speak with brokers and their customers about the lending options which would work best for those considering a major construction. We look into each application in a personalised way to ensure all aspects are considered in detail. Customers are increasingly coming to us with a complex financial profile with multiple income streams for instance. The algorithm of a high street lender may reject an application due to this type of complexity but we look into the situation in a more personalised way – we manually assess every application. This type of additional scrutiny makes it possible to say 'yes' in certain circumstances when the algorithm of a high street lender can't.

Secondly, I would also recommend researching the market, there's lots of cabin suppliers that cater for all budgets. Look at the delivery timetables carefully and the suppliers' promise to deliver within a given period. High demand for summer houses during these COVID times can mean delays.

Some suppliers offer complete services in preparing the ground work, as well as erecting the structure itself, so if you don't feel able, or time is an issue, then build in the extra cost of the services within your budget. These tips are the ones that immediately spring to mind.

My experience has been a good one - acquiring a summer house has been a cost effective option to quickly and easily gain valuable, additional living space.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Based on our own experience, enquiries relating to financing summer house builds and garden offices will continue to rise. We'll be pleased to speak to brokers looking to provide financing options for customers exploring this new, 'home working' opportunity.

*Craig Middleton*

Craig Middleton, Mortgage Sales & Distribution Manager,  
Harpenden Building Society



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We offer a manual underwriting process, no credit score involved.



A flexible view on merits of all cases - we're very accommodating.



We provide clear, fair and transparent charges for all cases.



Many types of income are considered when assessing affordability.