

Building Control Advice Leaflet



Loft Conversion

Make it an asset not a liability

Revision 1st October 2010



General

Why Convert?

Many people seek to provide extra living space in their home by utilising the loft area. It can provide attractive secure and valuable accommodation for extra bedrooms, a much-needed study or children's play room.

However if not constructed properly it can achieve exactly the opposite. It can detract from the value of the property; in extreme cases making the property unsellable. Most importantly it can also put the occupants of the room in danger in the event of a fire elsewhere in the house.

So, what is the right way to go about a loft conversion?

Where an existing **two-storey** dwelling house is to be 'added to' by the conversion of a roof space into habitable rooms, the following safety rules need to be considered.

Please Note: If the new storey is to have more than 2 rooms, or is over 50m² in floor area, different safety measures will apply.

Building Regulations Approval

New building works, including loft conversions, require approval under the Building Regulations. Generally this involves having plans of the proposals approved, and inspections being carried as work proceeds on site.

The approval and inspection service is available from the Local Authority. where further advice can be obtained from the Building Control Surveyors. Note: there is a charge for the approval and inspection service.

Structural Measures

Structural Alterations

Generally, timber joists of an existing ceiling will not have sufficient strength to support the additional weight of a new floor. This additional weight may also overload other parts of the building structure.

It may also be necessary to alter the existing roof structure to accommodate the new living space, or to gain access to it.

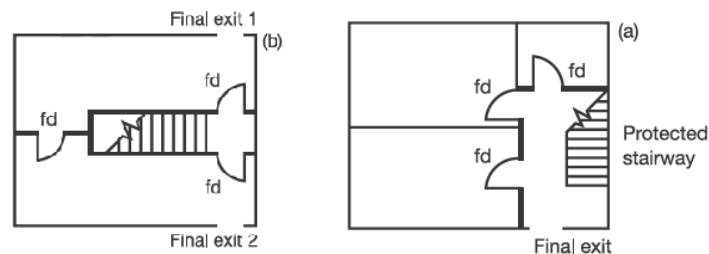
The construction of the walls on the first floor and ground floor of the property may require checking to determine if these are load-bearing and suitable to take any additional loading from the proposed loft conversion

Structural alterations of any kind should only be carried out with great care and an understanding of the individual site conditions. It is therefore advisable that the property is surveyed and relevant professional advice sought prior to undertaking the work.

Fire Safety

Enclosing the Existing Stair

The staircase / hallways to ground, first and second floor should be enclosed with walls and/or partitions that are fire resisting. This is in order to provide a safe route out of the building in case of fire. The enclosure should also extend to an external door. (See diagrams below)



Key
fd 20 Fire door
— 30 minute fire-resisting construction

Doorways

Existing rooms opening into the stair enclosure should be fitted with a fire door (20 minute fire resistant minimum). Any **new** door to a habitable room should also be a fire door. However self-closing devices are not required.

Doors to bathrooms and toilets do not need to be fire resistant as long as the structure separating the bathroom from another room is fire-resistant.

Fire Safety

Glazing

Any glazing in the stair enclosure, including glass in doors should be fire resisting. Again this would not apply to bathrooms.

New Stair

The new stair may be taken up as a continuation of the existing stairway, or may be placed in an enclosure that is separated from the existing stairway. It must not connect directly with another bedroom (or habitable room). This would be dangerous in the event of a fire in that bedroom.

Fire Separation

The new storey should be separated from the rest of the house by fire resisting construction. This is needed to prevent smoke and fire in the stairway from entering the new storey. This can be achieved by providing a fire door set in fire resisting construction either at the top or bottom of the new stair.

Fire Alarms

An automatic smoke detection and alarm system of linked smoke detectors, one on each level, should be installed. The smoke detectors should be mains powered with a battery back up, and usually positioned within the stair enclosure.

General requirements

Ventilation to the room

Natural ventilation should be provided to the proposed loft conversion equivalent to 1:20th of the floor area. There should also be a provision for suitable trickle ventilation.

Electrics

All electrical work required to meet the requirements of Part P (Electrical Safety) should be designed, installed, inspected and tested by a person competent to do so.

Prior to completion, the Council should be satisfied that Part P has been complied with. This will require an appropriate BS7671 electrical installation certificate to be issued for the work by a person competent to do so.

Energy Efficient Lighting

The greater of one energy efficient light fitting per four fixed lighting fittings or one energy efficient light fitting per 25% of the new floor area should be provided. These should not be GLS tungsten lamps with bayonet cap or Edison screw bases, or tungsten halogen lamps.

Heating System

If the properties heating system is to be extended into the loft suitable controls should be fitted i.e. thermostatic radiator valves.

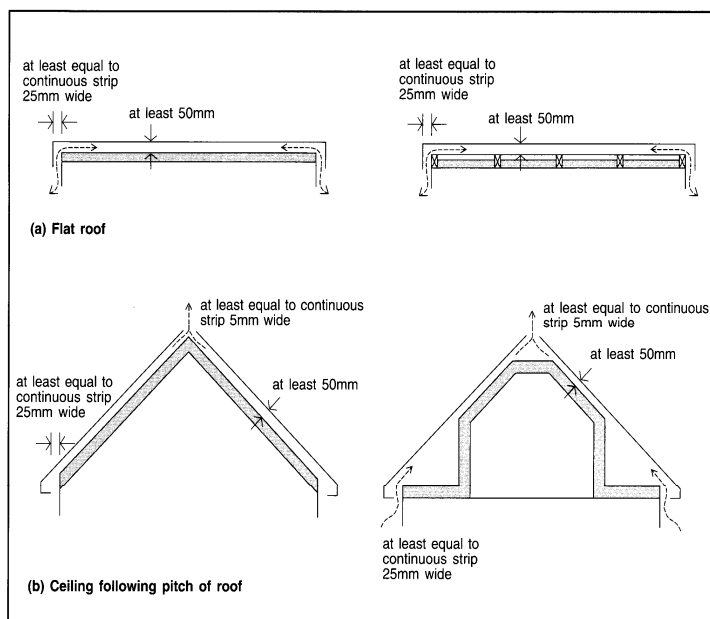
General requirements

Thermal Insulation

The Building Regulations also require that new works comply with thermal insulation standards, this is aimed at saving fuel and reducing your heating bill. Including a good standard of insulation will also help to create a better environment within the new room.

Ventilation of the Roof Space

With the introduction of insulation to the roof there is an increased risk of condensation forming within the roof structure, this can be overcome in a number of ways, one is to provide ventilation above the insulation. The following diagram indicates how this may be achieved.



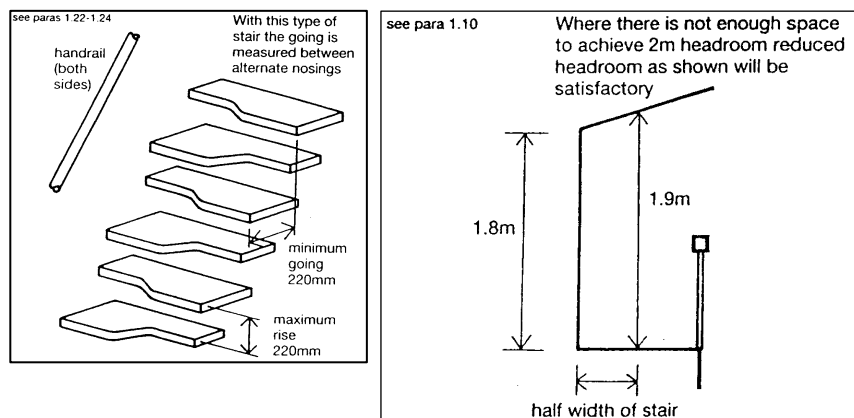
Safety on the Stair

Staircase Construction

A stair that meets the Building Regulation requirements for safe stairways should serve the new storey. Building Regulations Approved Document K (1998) gives advice on safe stair design.

The stair should not be too steep, as a general rule, it should not form more than a 42-degree angle with the floor.

It is recognized that the normal staircase dimensions may be difficult to fit into a loft conversion and it is therefore allowable to use fixed ladders or space saver staircases in certain circumstances (as the below diagram shows).



It is also possible to reduce the standard headroom as shown in diagram above. The staircase should also have appropriate handrails and protection from falling, to ensure safety.

Guidance Documents

There are a number of guidance documents published by the government to advise on approved methods of complying with the Building Regulations. These are called Approved Document. Below is a list of the current issue of applicable Approved Document:

- Approved Document A - Structure (2004)
- Approved Document B Volume 1 - Fire Safety (2006)
- Approved Document C - Site preparation and resistance to contaminants and moisture (2004)
- Approved Document D - Toxic substances (1992)
- Approved Document E - Resistance to the passage of sound (2003)
- Approved Document F - Ventilation (2010)
- Approved Document G - Sanitation, hot water safety and water efficiency (2010)
- Approved Document H - Drainage and waste disposal (2002)
- Approved Document J - Combustion appliances and fuel storage systems (2010)
- Approved Document K - Protection from falling, collision and impact (1998)
- Approved Document L1B - Conservation of fuel and power (2010)
- Approved Document N - Glazing - safety in relation to impact, opening and cleaning (1998)
- Approved Document P - Electrical safety (2006)

These documents are free to view at:
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>

One Stop Shop

The development control section runs a service called One Stop Shop. This is a free service with the aim of providing advice as to whether applications are required / likely to obtain permission. The appropriate form can be obtained from the reception area of Bryan Hanson House or the Civic Centre and can also be obtained by contacting the Development Control section.

Unauthorised work / Regularisation

It is an offence to undertake building work without notifying the local authority. If you have already undertaken a loft conversion to your property within the last 2 years the council may commence legal proceedings against you if an application to the authority has not been submitted and the authority is subsequently notified that works have been undertaken.

As an alternative it is possible to submit a regularisation application for the works. This application enables Building Control to inspect and assess the loft conversion after the works have been undertaken. If the works are satisfactory then a regularisation certificate can be issued which will be of benefit when selling the property. However please note that if the works are non-compliant the authority is not obliged to return the fee (even upon removal of the offending works). It is also important to note that if the loft is deemed to be dangerous you will be advised not to use it.

Other Considerations

This advice is not exhaustive, but aims to highlight some of the main points that can have an impact on the feasibility of a project when you are considering a loft conversion.

Each job will have individual characteristics relevant to the site, and your design aspirations. The Building Regulations cover a range of safety issues, which may also be relevant to your proposals. Such items can only be identified through the Building Control process.

For further information please do not hesitate to contact Hartlepool Borough Council Building Control on the following:

Email: building.control@hartlepool.gov.uk

Tel: 01429 523299

Fax: 01429 523599

Some aspects of a loft conversion can also require planning approval and advice should be sought from Development Control prior to commencement of any building work. They are contactable on the following:

Email: developmentcontrol@hartlepool.gov.uk

Tel: 01429 523741

Fax: 01429 523599