

## STAIRS

A retractable ladder is not a permitted means of access to a loft conversion. The four types that can be considered are

- A standard staircase
- A spiral staircase
- An alternating tread ('space saver') staircase
- A fixed ladder

The last two types are only acceptable where serving a single room (and a bathroom) and where it is not possible to create sufficient space for a standard or spiral stair.

The pitch (steepness) of the stairs and the dimensions of steps and balustrades must comply with the appropriate Building Regulations contained in Approved Document K. A full 2.0 metre headroom is required to new stairs although slight reductions are allowed where the ceiling slopes over the stair.

## SOUND INSULATION

With conversions in attached properties, the sound insulating properties of party walls within the loft space need to be considered. The Council may require parts of walls to be upgraded where they are of a lesser standard than walls at habitable floor levels. Where no party wall exists in the loft, a new wall must be constructed up to the underside of the roof finish with appropriate fire-stopping measures. The specifications of this wall should accord with Approved Document E that deals with sound insulation. A guidance leaflet is available on this subject.

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**NB: This leaflet can be  
supplied in other formats.**



## Building Control



**Householders Guidance  
Leaflet No 4**

**Loft Conversions**

**Updated April 2007**

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with guidance as to when you should submit an application under the Building Regulations for proposed works that involve the conversion of the roof space of a dwelling. It is not intended to provide comprehensive details of the associated Regulations but highlights the most important matters that need to be considered. As such works can be more complex than other extensions, we recommend that you seek professional assistance and submit a Full Plans application for us to check.

## IS AN APPLICATION REQUIRED?

Building Regulations permission is required for conversions that create any type of room in the roof space even where this is only for storage use. We would not require an application where a small proportion of the space is boarded for light storage or access to water tanks as long as this is only served by a retractable loft ladder.

## STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Most ceiling structures are not strong enough to serve as a floor. Upgrading the structure will involve the installation of new floor joists and in some cases steel or timber beams to carry the floor and roof loads.

- Existing walls, lintels and beams may need to be assessed for adequacy to carry additional loads. In some cases foundations may need to be exposed and checked.
- The involvement of a Structural Engineer is often needed to calculate the sizes of new structural members needed.

## FIRE SAFETY

The formation of a room in the roof of a two-storey house creates a potentially increased risk to occupants of the new floor in the event of a

fire. As a result of this the Regulations require the following matters to be considered.

- The required provisions for means of escape becomes more onerous with properties of greater numbers of storeys.
- **Loft conversions in bungalows:** Each habitable room should have an escape window as indicated in fig 2 below. Alternatively the rooms should have direct access to a 30min fire rated protected stair leading directly to a final exit.
- **Loft conversions in 2 storey houses:** Where the loft conversion creates rooms with floor >4.5m above ground the basic premise is to provide a fully protected stairway leading to a final exit. This could require the replacement of existing doors with fire doors and upgrading internal linings as necessary to achieve 30minutes fire resistance. 2007 changes to the Part B fire safety requirements have removed the concessions for loft conversions, though door closers and escape windows are no longer required as a result.

Where an open-plan layout exists at ground floor level it is likely that new partition walls will be required to enclose the protected escape route leading to the final exit. Where this is not desirable alternative provisions should be discussed with your local Building Control Surveyor.

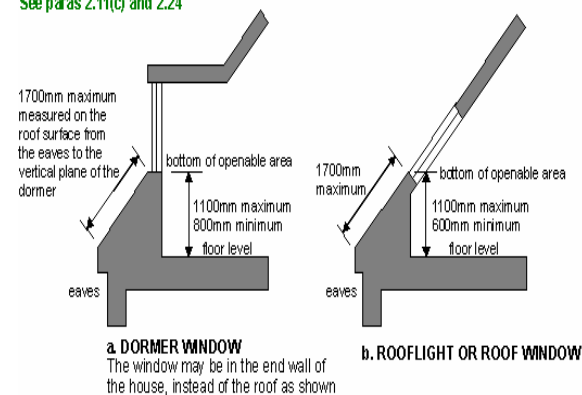
- **Loft conversions where there will be more than one storey >4.5m above ground:** In a dwelling with 4 or more storeys in addition to the protected stairway, each floor >7.5m above ground should have an alternative escape route to a point of safety.

This could include an external escape stair, communal balcony, or other secondary escape route etc. but would not include a fire escape window. If a secondary escape route is not possible or desirable the alternative is that the building is fitted throughout with a residential sprinkler system.

In all cases it is likely that an automatic smoke alarm/detection system will be required to provide early warning in the event of fire.

**More detailed fire safety guidance is provided in Approved Document Part B Volume 1 which is available on the Planning Portal website.**

See paras 2.11(c) and 2.24



**Note 1:** The window or rooflight should have a clear opening which complies with paragraph 2.11 a.  
**Note 2:** It is not considered necessary for the window in Diagram (b) to be provided with safety glazing.

Fig 2