

# Roof-space conversions: Converting your attic storage space to extend your home

## ***Guidance notes: 9***

You must apply to us for Building Regulations approval for work to convert a roof space or attic if the work will provide:

- an extra bedroom (maybe also with a bathroom);
- a playroom;
- a study or office; or
- a floored storage area.

If the roof space will be used to store lightweight items such as suitcases, general household items and so on, loose boarding with a ladder for access is usually suitable and you would not need to apply to us for this. (Under the Building Regulations, any steps at an angle of more than 55 degrees are classed as a ladder.)

Ceiling joists are generally not meant to act as a floor and are not designed to support heavy loads. So, if you plan to use the roof space for anything other than lightweight storage, it is important that you fit a proper floor and apply to us for Building Regulations approval.

If you plan to install a fixed stairway, you must apply to us for approval even if you plan to use the roof space for storing household items only.

## **Why do I need to apply for approval?**

We enforce the Building Regulations to make sure that buildings are built and altered to acceptable standards.

If work has been carried out without Building Regulations approval, this is often discovered when a house is being sold. This can delay and sometimes prevent a house sale.

Roof-space conversions are not straightforward. They should be designed and built by people fully aware of the fire-safety, structural-stability and general health and safety matters affecting the people who will use the house.

There are generally two types of roof-space conversion carried out:

- converting a single-storey property to a two-storey property; or
- converting a two-storey property into a three-storey property.

You must carefully consider the following points in roof-space conversions.

### **Converting a single-storey property to a two-storey property**

The new room, or rooms, must have emergency escape windows fitted. The Building Regulations call these 'emergency egress' windows. At least one of these windows must be in a position where it can be reached by ladder from the ground. (See note 1 below.)

You must install a suitable fire-detection and fire-alarm system throughout the property, including the following:

- a heat detector fitted in the kitchen.
- a smoke detector in the main living room.
- smoke detectors fitted in the hall and landing.

(See note 2 below.)

**New or existing** glazed doors must have fire-resistant glass fitted.

The new floor must be upgraded to be able to resist fire between the ground and first floor for a full 30 minutes.

### **Converting a two-storey property into a three-storey property**

The floor area must not be bigger than 50 square metres, and must include no more than two rooms, not including a bathroom, toilet or shower room.

The new room, or rooms, must have emergency egress windows fitted. You must be able to reach these windows with a ladder from the ground.

You must install a suitable fire-detection and fire-alarm system throughout the property, including the following:

- a heat detector fitted in the kitchen.
- a smoke detector in the main living room.
- smoke detectors in the hall and landings.

(See note 2 below.)

The doors to the new rooms must be solid self-closing doors which are able to resist fire for 30 minutes. The doors to the existing floors must be solid and self-closing.

The new floor must be upgraded to be able to resist fire between the first and second floor for a full 30 minutes.

**New or existing** glazed doors must have fire-resistant glass fitted.

## **Structure**

We will check the structure of the new floor and tell you if you need to upgrade it to make sure it can safely support the new loads placed upon it.

We will check the structure of the roof if you have fitted new dormer windows or roof lights.

## **Stairs**

The Building Regulations include standards for width, rise and going of the steps (the going is the depth of the tread). Also, you must have 2 metres clear headroom over stairs and landings.

## **Weatherproofing, thermal insulation and ventilation**

The walls and roof of the converted roof space need to keep out the rain and damp, and must also resist the passage of heat from the new rooms to the outside. Thermal insulation levels for the roof and any new walls must meet current standards for reducing heat loss (this will also reduce your heating bills).

Condensation, especially in areas where it cannot be seen, can cause problems. You should carefully consider roof layouts and types of roof construction in terms of thermal insulation, ventilation and checking for and preventing condensation.

New rooms must have suitable ventilation to prevent unpleasant living conditions.

As well as Building Regulation approval you may also need planning permission.

## **For more information:**

For more information on planning permission, contact:

The Planning Service

Bedford House

Bedford Street

Belfast BT2 8GB

Phone: 028 9025 2800.

**Note 1:** See our Guidance note 18: Guide to replacing windows in domestic properties for general advice.

**Note2:** See our Guidance note 12: Fitting smoke and heat alarms in domestic properties for advice.