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LOFT CONVERSIONS

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Loft Conversions

Thinking about a loft conversion? This guide covers key checks, regulations, fire safety, and what to expect before getting started.

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Converting your loft can be a cost-effective way of increasing living space in your home and the value of your property. While some lofts can't be converted, many can - although some are easier and cheaper to adapt than others.

KEY ADVICE

All loft conversions need building regulations approval and if you're the property owner, meeting the requirements is your responsibility.

If you are thinking of converting your loft, it's best to get professional advice, but as a first step, check:

- **The available head height over the staircase and landings.** This is the main deciding factor. There needs to be at least 2.2m between the top of the floor joists and the bottom of the ridge timber. This is so that there is at least 2m of headroom once new floors and beams etc have been fitted. You should also consider the headroom throughout the majority of the room. This is what is deemed a comfortable height. Find out more here.
- **Floor space.** Is the floor area large enough to make a useable room? This may also affect which type of loft conversion you opt for.
- **The pitch of the roof.** The steeper the pitch of your roof, the easier it is to convert your home, as there will be more head room and therefore more useable space.
- **The type of roof.** Your roof will have either traditional cut rafters which form the roof shape outline and enable you to form a space with minimal structural alterations or may have pre-formed trusses which make conversions more complicated and expensive.
- **Any other obstacles.** Many older properties have water tanks and chimney stacks which may either need to be removed or factored into any design for your conversion.

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Types of Loft Conversions

There are several types of loft conversion, each with their own benefits and possible planning restrictions:

Roof light conversion

This is the easiest and cheapest type of conversion, as skylights are simply added to fit flush with your home's existing roof. This type of conversion doesn't need planning permission (but will still need building regulations approval). However, because the pitch and shape of the roof is not altered, you need to have a decent amount of head space to begin with.

Dormer conversions

This is essentially an extension within the loft area. This is one of the most popular options because it creates more floor room and headspace. It can also be added to most kinds of roof – providing the roof has a slope. Within this category the main types of dormer conversions are flat roof dormers, where a vertical wall is built towards the bottom of the roof slope, with a flat roof built to meet it, and pitched roof dormers, where the dormer extension has a pitched roof, rather than a flat roof.

Hip to gable conversions

These add a large amount of headroom and functional floor area so are popular for detached, semi-detached or end of terrace properties with a small existing loft space (they're not possible for mid-terraced properties). They involve more work than a dormer or roof light conversion, as one of the

sloping roofs is replaced by a vertical wall of the same height as the roof, with the roof being extended out to meet the new vertical wall. You don't always need planning permissions for this type of loft conversion, but you should check with your local authority, as this can vary.

Do I need permission?

You are responsible for checking whether your project requires planning permission.

All loft conversions need building regulations approval and if you're the property owner, meeting the requirements is your responsibility. Building regulations are in place to make sure your loft conversion is structurally sound, warm and safe for you and your family to use.

You or your builder will need to apply for building regulations approval, normally providing detailed plans and structural calculations. Once approved, a Registered Building Inspector will carry out site inspections. Please note they will only visit the site periodically (when requested to do so by you or your builder) so won't see everything. They will check the work at pre-agreed stages to ensure that it appears to comply and issue a completion certificate only if the principal designer and contractor confirm the work complies with the regulations, and no contraventions are apparent after the final inspection.

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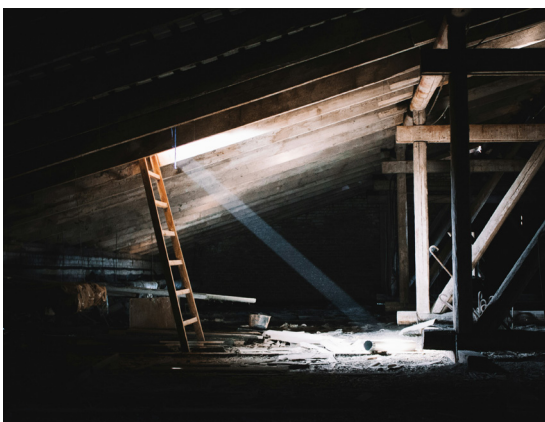


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What will be checked?

Your Inspector will check the plans and inspect the work on-site. They will look at a range of things – from structural integrity to electrics, ventilation, fire safety, means of escape, and insulation.

No one likes to think about a fire starting in their home, but fire safety is an important consideration when starting your project. As you're adding another level to your home, you are changing potential fire escape routes. Therefore (particularly if your home is two storeys already), you will need to re-evaluate your existing fire safety precautions throughout your home, not just the loft area. You will need a fire alarm system, and you can't just add a simple battery-operated smoke alarm to your loft rooms. If the alarm goes off on the ground floor, anyone in the loft conversion needs to hear it, to give them the best chance of escaping. Therefore, you need smoke alarms on each floor that are linked together, so when one is triggered, they all sound. This system must be mains-powered, with a battery back-up power supply (in case a fire causes a power cut).



What is a protected escape route, and do I need one?

By converting your loft, you're effectively adding an extra floor to your home. Because of this, fire safety measures are more rigorous as the windows in your loft conversion may be too high to escape from. The escape route from your loft conversion is normally the main hallway and staircase of your home. Therefore, this route needs to be 'protected' as much as possible and offer at least 30 minutes of fire resistance, giving you time to escape or be rescued by the emergency services. Most, if not all the doors that lead off from the staircase will need to be upgraded to give this fire resistance or be replaced with fire doors.

If your stairs lead to an open plan living area, they will either need to be enclosed with partition walls to keep the escape route protected, or you will need to install a sprinkler system in the open plan area and separate the ground floor from the first-floor escape route.

The materials used in your loft conversion, such as the flooring, doors, walls and loft stairs all need to offer at least 30 minutes of fire resistance. You may also need to upgrade the fireproofing on your ceilings below the new loft extension and in your existing stairwell. The fireproofing also applies to windows within the stairwell. This may sound like a lot of extra work, but these measures can save lives, so they're vitally important.

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You'll need a fully compliant staircase, unless you choose a fixed ladder, and your loft conversion will need to comply with all current regulations for structure, ventilation, insulation, electrical work and drainage etc.

Unless your home is detached, you will also need a **party wall agreement** with your neighbours before work starts. This must be obtained separately to building regulations approval.

Find out more about your loft conversion project [here](#).

KEY ADVICE

The steeper the pitch of your roof, the easier it is to convert your home, as there will be more head room and therefore more useable space.

The NHIC would like to thank the RMI WG2 Consumer Voice members for their contributions to this guide.

Please note that this guidance document, produced by the NHIC, was accurate at the time of its creation. However, information and regulations may have changed since this document was published. Therefore, seeking the most up-to-date information and expert advice is always advisable before making any decisions related to improving your home.

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