



BUILDING  
CONTROL

## 20 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LOFT CONVERSIONS

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jhai Ltd has given the answers to these questions in good faith and believes them to be correct at the time of going to press. However, always check with your Building Control Surveyor before proceeding on the basis of any of the information given, as individual site conditions, construction methods and other factors will determine the most appropriate solution.

## 01

### IS THERE A MINIMUM HEADROOM REQUIREMENT TO THE NEW LOFT ROOM?

Not to the room itself, although of course you need to be able to use the space. However, the new stairs will need a minimum 2.0m clear headroom over the whole flight, including landings. There are some reductions allowable in certain circumstances but please check with us.

## 02

### DO I NEED FIRE DOORS TO ALL ROOMS?

On a two storey house with an added loft the answer is generally yes. A protected route should be provided with 20 minute fire doors and mains wired smoke detection at each landing level.

## 03

### CAN I UPGRADE MY EXISTING DOORS?

In many cases this is possible. With the addition of intumescent materials and upgrades to thin panels, many existing doors can be upgraded. Contact us for further information.

## 04

### CAN I HAVE AN OPEN PLAN LAYOUT?

Open plan layouts create an additional risk to people on upper floors as the staircase can be affected by smoke more easily if there is a fire in the open plan area.

A sprinkler or misting system can be installed or physical separation at first floor level with the provision of alternative escape windows from this level could provide a solution.

## 05

### CAN I HAVE DOWNLIGHTERS IN MY CEILINGS?

Yes. In general a 30 minute fire rating is required to ceilings but there is no restriction on the provision of downlighters. Fireproof covers are not usually required unless you have 'engineered' joists.

## 06

### DO I NEED SMOKE DETECTORS?

Yes. Smoke detectors should be provided in the staircase to each landing level. They should be mains wired with battery backup. There are some simple rules to follow to ensure they are far enough away from walls. Contact us for more information.

# 07

## CAN I KEEP MY EXISTING CEILINGS?

In most cases yes you can. Existing ceilings should be in good condition and not show signs of cracking or disrepair. There are possible upgrading methods if they are in poor shape.

# 08

## DO I NEED MEANS OF ESCAPE WINDOWS?

These should only be used on the ground and first floor levels. For a loft room higher than this a protected stair enclosure is required. Escape windows should be sized to provide a minimum opening of 750mm x 450mm or 0.33m<sup>2</sup>.

# 12

## DO I NEED TO FIRE PROTECT THE CUPBOARDS ON MY STAIRS?

Cupboards should not present a risk to a protected stairway as a principle. Larger cupboards or storage spaces should be provided with additional fire protection but this is not required for normal small under stairs cupboards.

# 09

## DO I NEED TO INSULATE MY EXISTING ROOF?

Yes. Additional insulation will be required. There are many ways to meet the requirements, but in most cases the underside of the existing rafters will need to be built up to accommodate insulation material and plasterboard.

# 10

## CAN I REMOVE EXISTING PURLINS AND BRACES IN MY ROOF?

We would advise you consult a structural engineer if making alterations to your roof. The removal of purlins and other roof timbers can affect stability and may compromise the existing rafters. The provision of ridge beams and supports for the new walls and floors may be required.

# 11

## CAN MY EXISTING FOUNDATIONS TAKE THE NEW LOADING FROM MY LOFT ROOM?

Most foundations are suitable for the addition of another floor but some older properties may have shallow foundations. It is always advisable to ask a structural engineer to carry out an assessment.

# 13

## WHAT HEIGHT SHOULD THE BALUSTRADING BE AROUND THE STAIRCASE AND LANDING?

Guarding should be 900mm high for stairs and landings and not be readily climbable (avoid horizontal balustrading). If you have external balconies the guarding should be 1100mm high.

# 14

## I CANNOT FIT A NORMAL STAIRCASE IN TO SERVE MY NEW ROOM. IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO?

Yes. You can install a fixed ladder or an alternating tread staircase, provided that your new storey only has one habitable room. The new ladder or stair should be guarded as normal and fitted with non slip treads and a handrail both sides. Contact us for further information.

# 15

## WHAT VENTILATION SHOULD I HAVE TO MY NEW LOFT ROOM?

The window area should be least 5% of the floor area of a room, and background ventilation should also be provided equal to 4000mm<sup>2</sup> (a trickle ventilator in the window frame). Balcony doors can be treated as window area. Bathrooms should have mechanical extract fans. Subject to the insulation and tile underlay the void in the roof construction may also need ventilation.

# 16

## DO I HAVE TO TAKE THE SOIL AND VENT PIPE TO A NEW BATHROOM THROUGH THE ROOF?

Not necessarily, as an air admittance valve can be used. These valves need careful installation so ensure your plumber is competent. In general the valve should not be at the head of a run, and should not be externally sited unless an exterior grade air admittance valve is used. It should be vented if boxed in and there should be a vent to outside air somewhere on the drainage system.

# 17

## DO I NEED PLANNING PERMISSION FOR MY LOFT CONVERSION?

If your building is not listed or in a conservation area and only involves flush roof lights it is unlikely. Even if your conversion involves a dormer window, it may not need permission. Always check with your local council's Planning team.

# 18

## DO I HAVE TO USE THE LOCAL AUTHORITY FOR BUILDING CONTROL?

Of course not! jhai Ltd is an Approved Inspector licensed to carry out all Building Regulations inspections and approvals. Call 01308 428020 to find your local office or visit [www.jhai.co.uk](http://www.jhai.co.uk)

# 19

## MY EXTENSION INVOLVES STEEL BEAMS. CAN I SUPPORT THEM IN THE CHIMNEY STACK?

No. You would need to get a special hanger fabricated and line this with fire resistant board or you would need to construct the steel support around the chimney structure.

# 20

## CAN I HANG TIMBER SUPPORT BEAMS IN THE CHIMNEY?

No. Like steel beams, they must be suitably protected in fire resistant material. Additionally, if they are untreated, they should not be placed within 40mm from the brick face of the stack.

You'll probably have lots of questions that need answering as your project progresses. You can guarantee that we will be there to provide instant help and advice. jhai Ltd gives Building Control Approval to thousands of construction projects every year, from loft conversions to housing developments, from high street shops to superstores. We also provide a range of Energy Assessment Services and have in-house experts in Inclusive Design and Fire.

Join the many thousands of architects, builders and developers who have benefitted from our knowledge and experience in Building Regulations. We also offer an unrivalled service to small scale domestic developers, self-builders and homeowners.

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