



**The Building Control Division
Torbay Council**

Roebuck House, Abbey Road, Torquay, Devon, TQ2 5EJ

Phone: (01803) 208095 Fax: (01803) 208858 E-Mail: Building.Control@torbay.gov.uk

If you are thinking about converting your loft to create an additional room then you will need to apply for Building Regulation Approval. You may also need Planning Permission if you live in a conservation area and/or are installing a dormer window. This guidance note only deals with some of the major issues which often cause applicants difficulties. If you cannot find ways of dealing with them, it may not be possible to convert your loft at all. Please remember that this guidance note only applies to existing two storey houses where the new storey has a floor area of less than 50 square metres, does not create more than two habitable rooms and where the existing ridge is not raised.

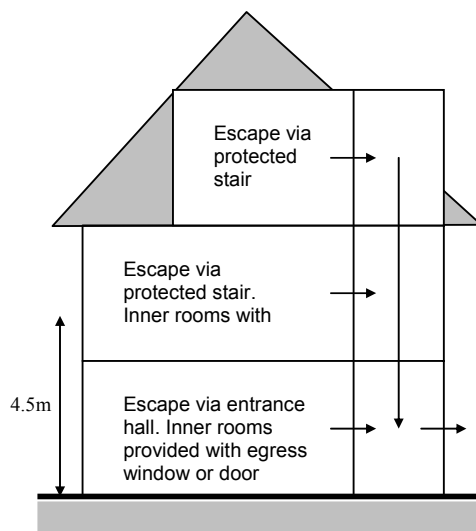
1. Does your design include a staircase that leads to an external door?

For existing two storey houses with an additional room in the roof, the stairs must be protected by fire resisting construction, fire doors and come down into a hall that leads to an external door, or there must be at least two separate escape routes available to an external door.

If you already have an open plan staircase it will therefore need to be enclosed. Alternatively, it may be possible to provide sprinkler protection to the open-plan area, in conjunction with a fire resisting partition and door (FD/E20), separating the ground floor from the upper storeys. This door should be so arranged to allow occupants of the loft room to access an escape window at first floor level in the event of a fire in the open-plan area.

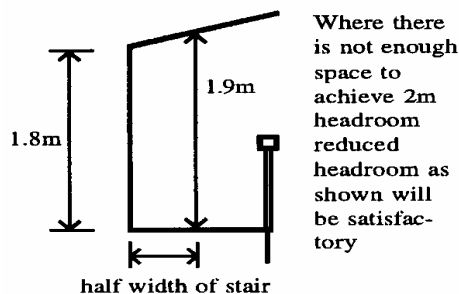
Any cooking facilities should be separated from the open-plan area with fire-resisting construction.

The diagram opposite illustrates what is required, note that in most cases existing doors will need to be upgraded or changed to fire resisting doors.



2. Can you achieve enough headroom over the new stairs?

Another key area is the headroom available over the staircase. It should be at least 2 metres although it can be reduced if headroom is limited (see the diagram opposite). A standard staircase must be installed wherever space is available, but where it is not, an alternating tread stair or fixed ladder may be acceptable to provide access to a single habitable room



3. Will I need a fire detection and alarm system?

Where new habitable rooms are provided above the ground level a fire alarm and detection system in accordance with the relevant recommendations of BS 5839-6:2004 to at least a Grade D Category LD3 standard should be installed. Smoke alarms should be provided in the circulation spaces between sleeping spaces and places where fires are most likely to start (e.g. kitchens and living rooms) to pick up the smoke at an early stages of a fire. There should be at least one smoke alarm on every storey of a dwellinghouse and where kitchens are not separated from the stairway or circulation space by a door, there should be a compatible interlinked heat detector or heat alarm in the kitchen, in addition to what ever smoke alarms are needed in the circulation space. (see also the provisions for sprinklers)

From April 2007 the guidance in the Approved Document Part B-Fire Safety recommends provision of fire detection and alarm systems and that escape stairs should be protected by fire resisting construction and doors (which need not be fitted with self-closing devices). There is no-longer a reliance on suitably positioned egress windows from 2nd floor loft rooms as alternative means of escape.

General considerations

1. To ensure that the stairway will normally remain available as a route of escape in the event of a fire, the existing stair at ground and first floor level must be enclosed in fire resisting construction (e.g. 12.5mm plasterboard on timber studs at 400centres (min 100mm thick overall) or blockwork). The route must lead to an external door at the foot of the stairs **or** a choice must be available to pass through one of two separate rooms to an external door. This is required so that if a fire occurred in one of the rooms, escape would always be possible through the other.
2. Existing doors to the protected escape route will need to be made FD or E20 standard. If it is considered undesirable to replace existing doors (e.g. if they are of historical or architectural merit) it may be possible to retain the doors or upgrade them to an acceptable standard.
3. Any glazing in partitions between a habitable room and the escape route must also be fire resisting. Georgian wired glass is usually acceptable in these situations.
4. The basic requirement for fire separation is to surround the new rooms in such a way that if a fire did occur below, the occupants would be protected from its effects for 30 minutes. To achieve this the new stair can continue up in the existing stair enclosure (in which case the fire door and separating structure will be at the top). Alternatively it can be enclosed in a fire protecting structure from first floor level upwards (in which case the fire door will normally open off the first floor landing).
5. The floor to the new rooms must have a 30-minute fire resistance over any part of the escape route directly below or above. This is often the case when, for example, the floor of the new room extends over a landing in the stairway enclosure below. Where the floor is only over other rooms a 'modified' 30 minute standard of fire resistance is required which is much easier to achieve.
6. Modern houses with trussed rafter roofs are usually unsuitable for loft conversions, as the inner members of the truss cannot normally be removed. While a structural engineer may be able to design a scheme to make this possible it is likely to be prohibitively expensive.
7. The existing ceiling joists in the roof will almost certainly be inadequate for use as floor joists. In most cases it is possible to install new floor joists between the existing ceiling joists to maximise the headroom available. For further details of typical floor construction see guidance note 13 (timber floors)
8. The new rooms will need to be surrounded by insulation to prevent excessive heat loss. Recent changes in the requirements for the energy saving performance of new and existing thermal elements of a building have resulted in increased thicknesses of materials that are difficult to accommodate within the construction. While there are many ways of achieving compliance, there are some traps for the unwary here and we would recommend that you check your chosen method with your Building Control Officer before any insulation is installed.
9. New sprinkler systems designed for use in dwellings are now becoming increasingly common, and where a whole house system is fitted as part of a loft conversion scheme it may be possible to accept situations which do not fully meet the fire protection or escape requirements outlined above. For example, an open-plan arrangement at ground floor level.
10. There are many other areas where the Building Regulations impose requirements relating to loft conversions, but if you can deal with the points raised in this document, you will be well on your way to getting approval. If you now wish to proceed you should make either a *full plans* or *building notice* application (but please read guidance note 01 (Building Regulations Applications) first so you can make an informed choice).

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