Building Control Guidance Note	Subject	Loft conversion advice For existing two storey dwellings							BCG003
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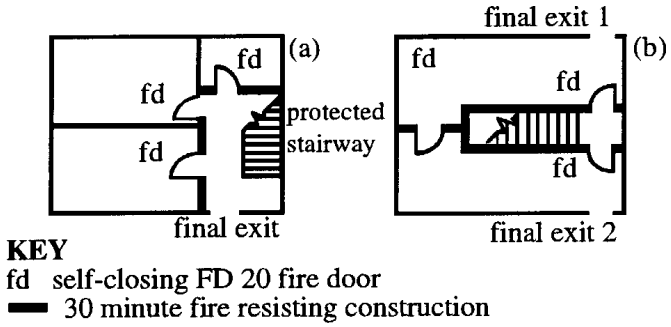
If you are thinking about converting your loft to create an additional room then you will need to apply for Building Regulation Approval. You may also need Planning Permission if you live in a conservation area and/or are installing a dormer window. This guidance note deals with the points, which most often cause difficulties for applicants. 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 staircase discharge to an external door?

At ground floor level the stairs must come down into a hall served by an external door, or there must be at least two separate escape routes available to an external door.

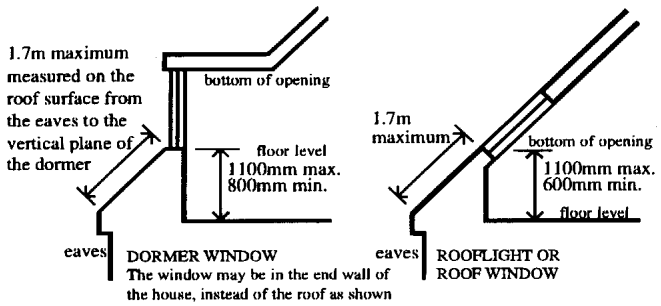
If you have an open plan staircase it will therefore need to be enclosed.

The diagram opposite illustrates what is required but see note (2) overleaf about existing doors



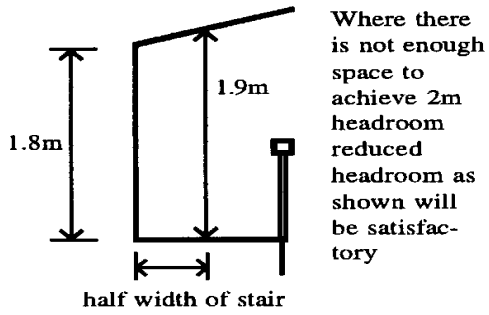
2. Can you provide a suitable escape window from the new second floor ?

All loft conversions require a window through which you could escape if the stairway became unusable. This window must have minimum clear opening of 0.33m^2, AND no less than 450mm high or 450mm wide (refer to guidance note 16 for more information). Existing purlins are often in the way when positioning an escape window and if the purlin needs moving you will require specialist structural advice.



3. 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



4. Automatic smoke detection and alarms.

Mains powered smoke alarms must be installed on each storey, and the alarms must be linked so that all sound even if only one is triggered. A smoke alarm must be placed within 7.5m of the door to every habitable room. Providing the smoke alarms used have a rechargeable battery, the mains power can come from a regularly used lighting circuit.

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. All **existing** doors to habitable rooms on the escape route need not be replaced with fire doors, but all **new** doors must be fire doors. **All** doors must be fitted with a self-closing device (rising butt hinges would be acceptable for this purpose) and any glazing must be fire resisting.
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. Escape windows (see overleaf for details of size and position) must normally be provided in each of the new habitable rooms. The only exception to this occurs in a two-room loft conversion, where a window in only one of the two rooms is acceptable provided each has a separate doorway onto the stairway enclosure, and there is a separate communicating door between the two rooms. It is important that there is access and space available at ground level to allow the escape windows to be reached by a ladder; extensions or conservatories can often make this difficult.
7. 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.
8. 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 6
9. The new rooms will need to be surrounded by insulation to prevent excessive heat loss. While there are many ways of achieving this, 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.
10. 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, in Rushcliffe we will not require new doors to be fire doors, any doors to be fitted with self closing devices or the upgrading of the fire resistance of walls or floors, providing the whole building is protected by a properly designed and installed sprinkler system. An escape window in the new room(s) and smoke alarms would still be required.
11. 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 001 first so you can make an informed choice).