



## Planning an Attic Conversion?

This leaflet provides guidance on how to achieve compliance with the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 and subsequent amendments when carrying out an attic conversion. When the intention is to provide one or more rooms in an attic, a Building Regulation application is required.

This includes the provision of any of the following uses:

- An extra bedroom (and or a bathroom)
- A playroom
- A study/office
- A store
- A floored storage area

Not all attics are suitable for conversion and issues may prevent conversion being a practical solution to gaining more space, issues such as:

- There is not enough height to enable you to stand comfortably within the attic space
- The attic space is not large enough to provide a suitable habitable space
- There are services passing through the attic space which may be difficult to relocate
- There is insufficient space to locate a suitable fixed stair on the floor level below to access the attic conversion

Where the intended use is to store lightweight items such as suitcases, general household items, etc., then the provision of loose boarding is generally satisfactory. An application would not be required in such circumstances, provided that the access to the area is by ladder and not by a new or fixed staircase. NOTE: Trussed rafter roofs are not designed to include loading even from storage of domestic household items.

### **Why inform Building Control Services?**

The duty of Building Control Services is to ensure compliance with Building Regulations and to ensure buildings are constructed or altered to the minimum legal standards.

Where such works have been carried out without Building Control notification, problems may arise if the property is subject to a future sale, as the conveyancing process will highlight any changes that have been made to the property.

Many people believe that the conversion of an attic is a relatively simple procedure but often this is not the case!

The following are the main areas of consideration, including recent Regulation changes when considering the conversion of an attic.

### **Single Storey Dwellings**

The structural adequacy of the new floor, or where ties and struts of a truss roof are being removed to create the space must be checked to ensure it can safely accommodate the new loads placed on it without suffering collapse or excessive deflection. Remember, ceiling joists are generally not intended to act as a floor and are not designed to support heavy loads. These may have to be upgraded.

A modified half-hour fire-resistant floor construction is required for the new storey. This will involve flooring the full area between the supports for the floor and may also require upgrading the ceiling where the plasterboard is less than 12.5mm thick or an alternative insulant being placed between the floor joists.

All new habitable rooms in the converted area will require an emergency egress window.

Automatic detection and alarms are required incorporating interlinked mains powered alarms with battery back-up. The smoke detection will be placed in the circulation routes on all levels and in the principal habitable room on the ground floor and a heat alarm in the kitchen.

The stairs from the first floor should discharge into a hall or into a habitable room provided there is an exit door within 3m of the foot of the stairs. The stairs should not discharge into the kitchen.

There should be sufficient space to fit a complying flight of stairs. The main considerations are:

- The pitch which is not to exceed 42° e.g. a minimum going of 220mm requires a rise of 198mm or a maximum rise of 220mm requires a going of 244mm.
- Head height – a minimum 2m is required over the pitch line of the stairs and to the landing at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Width of the stair (see table below)

Width of Stair to Attic Conversion	
(a) Providing access to one room only (not being a kitchen or living room) or to a bathroom or water closet	600mm
(b) Other than (a) above	800mm

Consideration must also be given to ventilation requirements to prevent condensation within the attic and structure.

Insulation is required to the thermal elements, to comply with the new amended Building Regulations Part F1, introduced October 2012.

Sound Insulation is required in accordance with Building Regulations Guidance, Technical Booklet G, introduced October 2012, to reduce unwanted noise through walls and floors around bedrooms and bathrooms. If you are converting the loft of a semi-detached or terraced property you will need to ensure the sound resistance of the party wall is upgraded so that sound transmission to your neighbours is reduced.

### **Two Storey Dwellings**

In addition to the previous requirements, when you are converting an attic of a two-storey dwelling, the following fire safety measures are applicable if the converted area does not exceed 50m<sup>2</sup> and does not contain more than two habitable rooms.

- The stair shall be enclosed in fire resisting construction
- The new storey shall be separated from the rest of the dwelling house by fire resisting construction
- All glazing within the stair enclosure to be upgraded to half-hour fire resistance (integrity and insulation values)
- All existing doors on the protected hallway must be imperforate and doors to habitable rooms must be fitted with door closers
- All new doors to the protected stairway must be self-closing fire resisting doors
- The stair must discharge into a hallway with access to the exit
- All rooms must be fitted with emergency egress window

Where a conversion exceeds 50m<sup>2</sup> or contains more than two habitable rooms the stairway should be upgraded to a full half-hour fire resisting construction. This applies to doors as well.

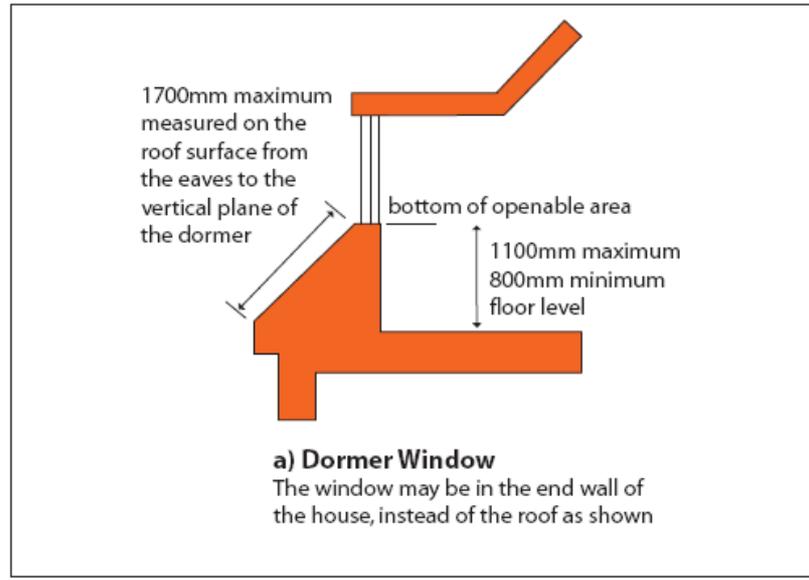
### **Three Storey Dwellings**

If your dwelling already has three storeys, attic conversions become more complicated. You are likely to need to install a second escape stair and the project will need specialist design. Please contact Building Control for more detailed advice if you are considering converting the attic of a three storey dwelling.

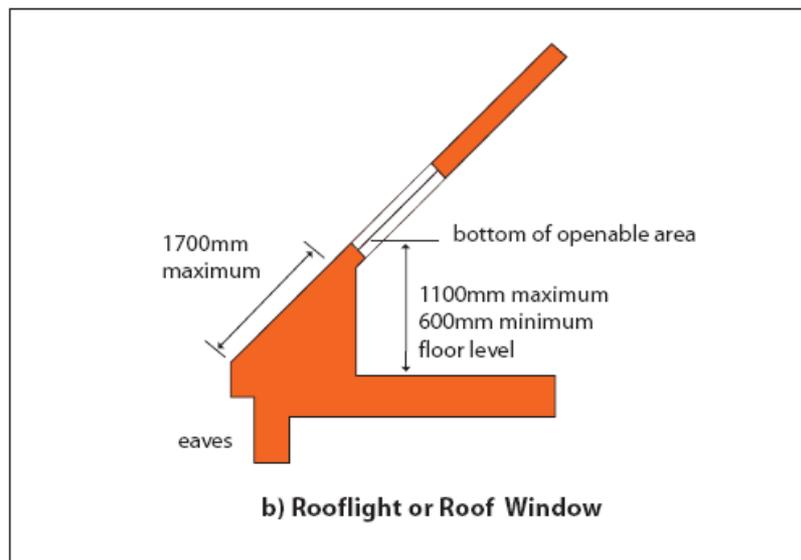
### **Additional Information**

Any emergency egress window should have the following dimensions:

- A clear opening of 0.33sqm
- Have a minimum dimension that is either 450mm high or 450mm wide i.e. 450mm W x 733mm H, clear opening
- The lower edge of the window opening is between 800mm & 1100mm above floor level, except in the case of a roof light the bottom edge can be as low as 600mm above floor level and located 1700mm from the eaves



There is a need to check that it is possible to get access from the ground for rescue by ladder e.g. will a conservatory impede access? Building Control Services is here to help with any enquires you have on this subject.



The above are the main areas that need to be addressed when converting your attic. As each conversion will provide a unique set of circumstances, you should contact the Building Control Surveyor for your designated Council area who will advise you on all aspects applicable to your application.

A Building Regulation application for an attic conversion can be made with a Full Plans application. For further details see our guidance leaflet 'Making a Building Control application'.

## **The Planning Service**

In addition to Building Regulation approval you may also require planning permission in certain circumstances. Further information can be obtained from your local planning office.

A number of leaflets have been produced by Building Control Northern Ireland to assist you with work you may undertake at your property. To ensure your work is carried out effectively please contact your local Building Control Service for advice and information relating to your project.

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