

Loft Conversions and Dormer Extensions

This fact sheet can be made available in other languages or formats on request by contacting 0161 770 6666. For further information please see our detailed fact sheet **Information for all**.

Many families in Oldham suffer from overcrowded homes. Some can and do move to a larger house as their family grows. Others will extend their houses, but for many this is not always possible. The council is therefore very keen to encourage people to make the most of the every part of their existing houses.

One way of doing this is to make use of the space within their loft areas and, where this can be achieved, it can be very cost effective. However, not every loft can be turned into living space because of the way in which the house was originally built.

Whatever the circumstances, perhaps the most important thing to check before extending into your roof space is whether or not it can be done in a way that will create space that will be safe for people to move into.

That means that the alterations should not be made in a way that will weaken the original structure or will make it difficult to escape from in an emergency. How you can achieve this, is set out in the Building Regulations.

When it comes to the new living space itself, the key requirements of the regulations are to ensure the provision of natural lighting, ventilation, thermal insulation and adequate headroom.

The requirement in terms of headroom can be particularly difficult to achieve in certain types of houses. A crude rule of thumb suggests that unless the height between underside of the ridge board (the uppermost point of the roof where the different roof planes meet) to the top of the ceiling joists is in excess of 2.4 metres (8' feet) it is unlikely that the attic space is capable of being adapted to any habitable use. There may be sufficient height in the middle, but to get adequate headroom in all of the roof, it may be necessary to lift the roof by means of a dormer extension, or to lower the original ceiling below.

Whilst that might sound straightforward, dormer windows can lead to a significant change in the character and appearance of a house and that in turn can impact on neighbours, for example a loss of privacy and amenity from overlooking and overshadowing due to their size and location on the roof.

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Will I need permission?

In almost all circumstances you will need to satisfy the Building Regulations. This is to ensure amongst other things that your home remains: structurally safe, the emergency escape provisions are appropriate; the property is energy efficient and has adequate ventilation. This applies whether you are proposing to live in the additional space that you create or not. The requirements may be different if you only propose to construct a rudimentary storage area in the loft. You can get further advice on this from the Building Control Team. The point to stress here is that it is actually a criminal offence not to comply with the Building Regulations. Furthermore undertaking works in contravention could complicate or jeopardise any future property sale, as conveyancing solicitors are obliged to ask for copies of all approvals /completion certificates before concluding a sale.

You will not necessarily need to apply for planning permission. Homeowners normally have certain rights to extend their homes without the need for planning permission (these rights are known as 'Permitted Development').

Whatever your permitted development rights, however, you will need planning permission if you live in the Peak District National Park Area, in a Conservation Area or in a Listed Building.

In simple terms, you will always need permission if the dormer extension you want to build:

- would be on the front of your house
- would be higher than the highest part of your existing roof
- would mean that you would be adding more than 40 cubic metres in volume in the case of a terraced house or 50 cubic metres in volume in any other case to the roof space
- would include the provision of a veranda, balcony or similar raised platform
- would require the installation, alteration or replacement of a chimney, flue or soil and vent pipe

Rear dormers may not always require planning permission.

It is always recommended that you check with the Development Control Team before starting any works on a dormer extension.

Can I get grant towards the cost of my work?

There are no grants available for this type of work.

What do I need to do to satisfy the Building Regulations?

This is an increasingly complex piece of legislation supported by a large amount of guidance that has the health, safety and welfare of you and your family at heart, so if you have any doubts on how the regulations may affect you, then don't leave it too late. Consult the council's Building Control Section or a chartered surveyor. If you want to read the regulations for yourself you can do so on the Planning Portal website:

www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/professionals/buildingregs/legislation/bccurrentlegislation/bcbuildingregulationssis/

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You may also need to seek permission from your neighbours before work goes ahead as the Party Wall Regulations apply. Essentially these are about protecting the rights of your neighbour if you are doing anything which might affect a common wall. Again, it is best to seek professional advice on how they apply before you start any work. More information is available from the council's Building Control Section or visit: www.rics.org/partywallsguide

To obtain approval under the Building regulations, you may submit either a Full Plans or a Building Notice Application. A full plans application means that you will have had detailed plans prepared, which are submitted to the council for assessment and approval. You can however proceed more quickly by virtue of a Building Notice Application - which doesn't benefit from a formal approval; but instead relies entirely on site inspections and the completion certificate. Use of the full plans approach is strongly recommended by Building Control, to ensure that all the safety requirements are met before work starts. This is particularly relevant to the structural and fire safety aspects of the Building Regulations as it is with these parts that most difficulties arise for this type of work. The majority of problems that occur with roof level alterations and conversions do so when a Building Notice application has been made, giving little opportunity to pre-empt deviations from the Building Regulations until the works are undertaken. This can result in expensive remedial work for the contractor or owner.

Structural Issues

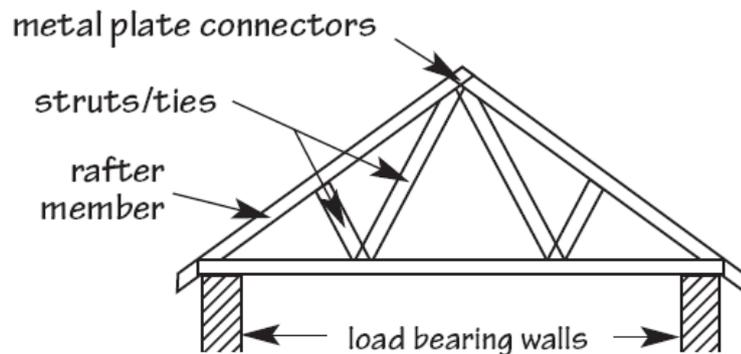
Most loft conversions/dormer extensions require structural alterations in one form or another. The extent of alterations depends upon:

- The suitability of existing walls and foundations which may require underpinning to strengthen them
- The suitability of the existing roof structure. In many types of roof construction, particularly more recent ones, some of the roof timbers may need to be moved or even removed in order to provide clear unobstructed space to make the roof space usable. Modern pre-fabricated roof truss rafters are seldom suitable for adaption to a loft conversion;
- The internal layout of the dwelling.

Bearing in mind that much of the Borough's existing building stock is in excess of one hundred years old, it is strongly recommended that anyone contemplating a loft conversion has their property subjected to a structural appraisal by a qualified surveyor or structural engineer to determine whether it can be safely adapted.

How can I modify my roof structure to convert the space into a room?

Much depends upon what your existing roof consists of e.g. traditional rafters/purlins construction, or the more modern roof truss design. Where roof trusses have been used these should not be modified in any way without specialist advice from either/both Building Control and a qualified structural engineer.



The simplest form of adaptation is that of installing one or more rooflights in the existing sloping roof. More radical changes to create usable space generally involve the provision of a dormer structure. These can vary in size, shape and complexity; each of which can often be influenced by the existing roof configuration e.g. the presence of hipped ends and valleys etc.



Fire Safety - Is it safe to use my loft space for additional accommodation?

From a fire safety perspective it is fair to say that the height of the property influences the complexity of the fire safety measures to be included, to ensure provisions for the safe escape/rescue of the occupants. Any loft conversion/dormer extension intended to provide new habitable accommodation within the attic space of an existing two storey houses must be accessed via a 'protected route' - directly out of the new loft space, to a final exit at the ground floor level e.g. without passing through another room at any level in the property. Current practice involves a requirement for the upgrade/replacement of all existing doors opening off the stairway (bathroom and toilets excepted) with doors affording at least twenty minutes fire resistance.

With bungalows, the fire precaution requirements are often less onerous, relying instead on an escape window provision from each habitable room at first floor level – where this is not practicable for what ever reason, then the protected route requirement will apply.



In addition to the escape provisions, it will in all cases be necessary to install mains powered smoke detectors at each level within the property (usually within the staircase exit route) and these should be suitably interlinked to ensure that if one is activated, they all sound together, thus alerting people or rousing people from their sleep, to effect an escape.

Why do I need insulation?

Traditionally attic spaces have been well ventilated (draughty) to allow the building to breathe and thus avoiding very damaging condensation forming on cold surfaces. The Government see the combination of regular changes to insulations standards, and the introduction of financial incentives for householders to become more energy conscious, as the means of reducing both carbon emissions and energy costs for the existing building stock. This applies equally to the change of use of attic spaces into habitable accommodation, resulting in the need for well insulated walls and ceilings where they abut the external air and/or cold void areas, together with construction methods to prevent condensation damage.



A second but equally important form of insulation must also be considered, that of sound insulation, particularly for those properties with shared party walls. Many party walls of older property consist of a single skin of brickwork, which on its own offers very poor sound insulation properties. In loft conversion it is now necessary to line the party wall with sound insulation quilt – usually within a stud frame or between battens attached to the wall.

Do I need Natural Light and Ventilation in each new room?

Yes you do for habitable rooms (but not to store rooms). This is usually provided by means of rooflights, dormer windows and to a lesser extent modern proprietary 'sun pipes'. The necessary ventilation is usually afforded by natural means via opening lights in the windows provided. The size of the opening lights should equate to at least 5% of the floor area of the room. Some rooms need mechanical ventilation to rapidly remove moisture laden air e.g. bathrooms and shower rooms etc.



What if I need Planning Permission?

You will need to have plans drawn up of what you are proposing to do. In most cases the plans you need to obtain Building Regulations approval will be sufficient to enable you to apply for planning permission. Once you have your plans you will need to complete a planning application form and submit it with your plans and the appropriate fee.

Application forms can be downloaded from the council's website by visiting:

<http://www.oldham.gov.uk/householder-application-form.pdf>

or, alternately, through the Planning Portal by visiting:

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/genpub/en/1011888236124.html>

Guidelines for householder planning applications are available by visiting the council's website and viewing the validation checklist at:

<http://www.oldham.gov.uk/plan-app-checklist-types.pdf>

How Will Your Planning Application Be Assessed?

All planning applications will be considered on their own merits, as each property will have its own unique set of issues. Do not, therefore, presume that if your neighbours have a loft conversion with a dormer extension that you will also be granted planning permission.

Because every house is different there are no set rules for what makes an acceptable dormer extension. The following criteria are used when applications for permission are considered. They should provide useful guidance if what you are proposing is permitted development.

- Dormers are less likely to be acceptable on front elevations than at the back and in streets where there are no other dormers to the front
- On a front elevation a dormer is unlikely to be acceptable if it is more than half the width of the existing roof. A pair of small dormers is preferable to a single large one
- To the rear of the property larger dormers may be acceptable. In all instances dormers should be set back by at least 1m from the original front or rear wall and should not come within 0.5m of the side/party walls
- In all instances the design should reflect the dwelling's original shape, size, alignment and architectural integrity
- Dormer windows should line up vertically with existing windows and match their style and proportions

Flat dormer roofs should be avoided, unless considered more appropriate to the particular building or the street scene.

Part of the consideration of your proposal will be its impact on your neighbours or the character of the area. The council will be particularly concerned to ensure that:

- The dormer would not result in undue overlooking of a neighbouring property
- The dormer would not detract from the character of neighbouring properties through excessive bulk, ill-matched materials or inconsistent design
- The dormer would not have a detrimental effect on the appearance of the street scene and general character of the area
- The dormer would not significantly reduce the amount of daylight and sunlight enjoyed by neighbouring properties

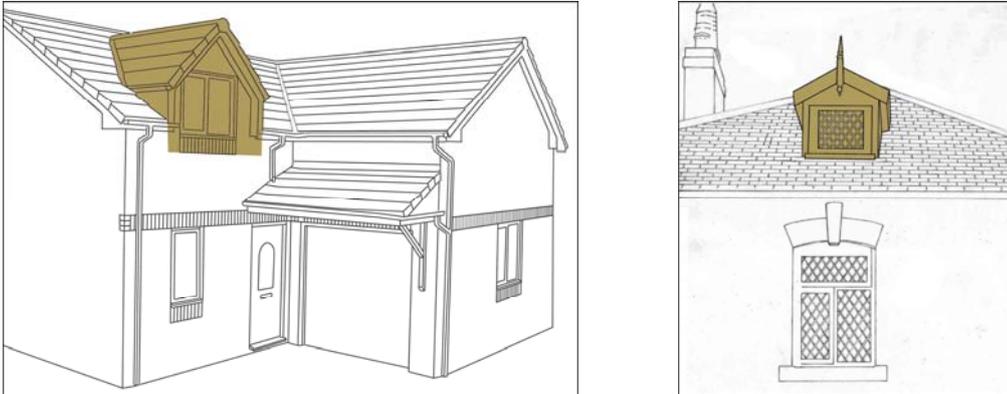


Fig 1. The materials and design should be in keeping with the existing house, with matching materials, and windows reflecting the horizontal and vertical alignment of existing windows.

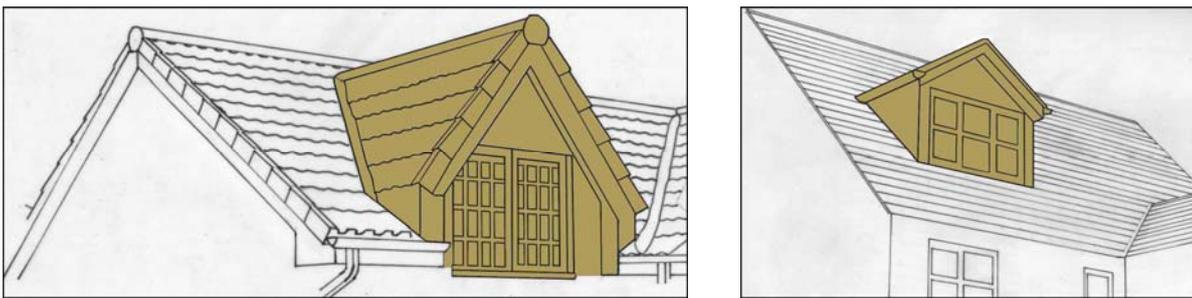


Fig 2. Dormers should appear subservient and be set lower than the ridge height of the existing roof. Dormers should also be proportionate, and not excessively bulky in relation to the rest of the roof.



Fig 3. Dormers should be set back from the eaves line and the end or party walls

Bats

Bats and their roosts are fully protected by the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* and the *Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1994*. If there is any indication that bats are living in your roof, they must not be disturbed or removed without notifying the relevant organization. The usual evidence of roosting is their droppings. If you think that bats roost in your loft, you should contact the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit, English Nature or South Lancashire Bat Group.

Further Information

If you require any assistance with regard to the content of this advice note, please contact:

Development Control Team

Tel: 0161 770 4105 Fax: 0161 770 3104

E mail: planningadmin@oldham.gov.uk

Building Control Team

Tel: 0161 770 4122 Fax: 0161 770 4103

E mail: building.control@oldham.gov.uk

Contact

You can access fact sheets in a number of ways:

Download: www.oldham.gov.uk/factsheets.htm

Tel: 0161 222 6644

Fax: 0161 222 6944

Email: contact@oldham.gov.uk

Write to: Contact Oldham, PO Box 196,
Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham OL1 1QJ

Call in: to any council office and requesting them
