

Do you need planning permission for a loft conversion in England?

Most loft conversions in England can proceed as permitted development without a planning application, but volume limits, roof type, location and property type all affect whether that right applies to you. Read on to find out exactly where you stand before work begins.

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QUICK ANSWER

Many loft conversions in England are permitted development and need no planning application — subject to volume limits of 40 cubic metres for terraced houses and 50 cubic metres for other houses.

KEY FACTS

Governing legislation

GPDO 2015

Relevant schedule

Part 1, Schedule 2

Volume limit — terraced house

40 cubic metres

Volume limit — semi-detached or detached

50 cubic metres

Dormer on front elevation fronting a highway

Planning permission required

Applies to flats and maisonettes?

No — check with LPA

Building regulations required even if PD?

Yes, always

Common misconception: 'loft conversions never need planning permission'

Permitted development ('PD') rights cover many loft conversions, but they are not a blanket exemption. Volume limits, the position of dormers, designated land status and property type can all mean that planning permission is required. Always check your specific circumstances before work starts.

Common projects

Loft conversion — terraced house

Permitted development if the additional roof space created does not exceed 40 cubic metres (including any previous enlargements) and all other conditions are met.

Loft conversion — semi-detached or detached house

Permitted development if the additional roof space does not exceed 50 cubic metres (including any previous enlargements) and all other conditions are met.

Dormer window on principal elevation fronting a highway

Not permitted development — a planning application is required.

Rooflight on principal elevation

May be permitted development under Class C provided it meets the relevant requirements — unlike a dormer, it does not extend beyond the roof plane.

Any roof extension on designated land (conservation area, National Park, AONB, Broads, World Heritage Site)

Not permitted development — a planning application is required.

Loft conversion including a balcony

Not permitted development — a planning application is required.

Flat or maisonette

Flats and maisonettes do not benefit from normal householder permitted development rights; check with the LPA.

What are permitted development rights?

In planning terms

Permitted development (PD) — A national grant of planning permission that allows certain building works — including some loft conversions — to be carried out without a planning application. These rights are set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (GPDO 2015), Part 1 of Schedule 2. They are subject to conditions and limitations and do not remove the need for building regulations approval or other consents.

Before starting any loft conversion it is wise to ask your council's planning service whether the specific proposal falls within PD rights. Regulations are continually updated, and local circumstances — such as an Article 4 direction — can restrict rights that would otherwise apply.

Volume limits: how much roof space can you add?

House type	Maximum additional roof space (cubic metres)	Previous enlargements count?
Terraced house	40 cubic metres	Yes — any earlier roof enlargement must be included in the allowance
Semi-detached or detached house	50 cubic metres	Yes — any earlier roof enlargement must be included in the allowance

The volume is measured against the 'original roof space' — that is, the roof space as it existed in the original building (or as it stood on 1 July 1948 if built before that date). If a previous owner has already extended the roof, that volume counts towards your allowance even if you did not carry out the work yourself.

In addition, no part of the enlarged house may exceed the height of the highest part of the roof of the existing house. The highest part is the ridge line of the main roof (or the highest roof where roofs are flat). Chimneys, parapet walls and similar protrusions above the ridge line are not taken into account when making this assessment.

Dormers, rooflights and hip-to-gable conversions

The position of your proposed alteration relative to the street matters a great deal. Dormer windows and any other enlargement that would extend beyond the plane of an existing roof slope on the principal elevation of the house — where that elevation fronts a highway — are not permitted development and will require a planning application.

Rooflights on a principal elevation are treated differently: they may be permitted development under Class C of Part 1, Schedule 2, provided they meet the requirements of that Class, because they do not project beyond the plane of the existing roof slope.

Balconies are never permitted development

If your loft conversion involves the construction or provision of a verandah, balcony or raised platform, it is not permitted development regardless of volume or location. You will need to submit a planning application.

Materials used in any exterior work must be of a similar appearance to those used in the construction of the exterior of the existing house. This condition applies to all roof alterations that are permitted development under these rules.

Where permitted development does not apply

Householder permitted development rights for roof extensions are removed entirely in certain locations and for certain property types. On Article 2(3) land — which includes National Parks, the Broads, areas of outstanding natural beauty (legally still an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty / AONB), conservation areas, and land within World Heritage Sites — roof extensions are not permitted development and a planning application is required.

- Land within a National Park
- The Broads
- An area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB)
- A conservation area designated under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- A World Heritage Site

Householder permitted development rights also do not apply to flats, maisonettes, or houses created through the permitted development rights to change use set out in Classes M, N, P, PA and Q of Part 3 of Schedule 2 to the GPDO 2015. Flats and maisonettes do not benefit from normal householder permitted development rights; check with the LPA.

An Article 4 direction made by your local planning authority can also remove PD rights in a specific area or for specific types of development. Always check whether one applies to your property before assuming PD rights are available.

Listed buildings: a separate consent regime

If your house is a listed building, listed building consent is a separate regime from planning permission. Works that affect the character of a listed building — including a loft conversion — may require listed building consent in addition to, or instead of, planning permission. Curtilage is a fact-sensitive question; always consult your local planning authority.

Check before you start: LDCs and building regulations

Even if you are confident that your loft conversion falls within permitted development, you can apply to your local planning authority for a 'lawful development certificate' (LDC). An LDC is a formal confirmation that your proposed works are lawful and do not require a planning application. It is not obligatory, but obtaining one is strongly advisable if you plan to sell the property or if there is any doubt about the position.

1. Confirm your property type

Permitted development rights apply to houses, not flats, maisonettes, or houses created through specified change-of-use PD rights.

2. Check for designated land status

Find out whether your property is in a National Park, the Broads, an AONB, a conservation area or a World Heritage Site — roof extension PD rights are removed in all of these.

3. Check for Article 4 directions

Ask your local planning authority whether an Article 4 direction applies to your property, which could remove PD rights that would otherwise be available.

4. Calculate your volume allowance

Include any previous roof enlargements when working out whether you are within the 40 or 50 cubic metre limit.

5. Identify your principal elevation

If a dormer is proposed on a roof slope forming the principal elevation that fronts a highway, a planning application will be required.

6. Apply for a Lawful Development Certificate

Consider applying for an LDC from your local planning authority to obtain formal confirmation that the works are lawful before starting on site.

7. Obtain building regulations approval

Permitted development rights do not remove the requirement for building regulations approval. A loft conversion will almost always require building regulations sign-off regardless of PD status.

Permitted development rights do not remove requirements for permissions or consents under other regimes such as the building regulations and the Party Wall Act.

GPDO 2015 Technical Guidance, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Frequently asked questions

Not sure whether your loft conversion needs planning permission?

Use the Planning Portal's interactive house tool to explore what is and is not permitted development for your home, or find your local planning authority to get pre-application advice.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the volume limit for a loft conversion under permitted development?

The limit is 40 cubic metres of additional roof space for a terraced house and 50 cubic metres for a semi-detached or detached house. Critically, any previous roof enlargement to the property — whether carried out by you or a previous owner — must be counted towards the allowance. Exceed the limit and you will need to apply for planning permission.

Do dormer windows on the front of a house need planning permission?

Yes. A dormer window or any roof enlargement that extends beyond the plane of an existing roof slope on the principal elevation of the house — where that elevation fronts a highway — is not permitted development. You will need to submit a planning application. A rooflight on the same elevation is treated differently and may be permitted development under Class C, provided it meets the relevant conditions.

Can I convert my loft without planning permission if I live in a conservation area?

No. On Article 2(3) land — which includes conservation areas, National Parks, the Broads, areas of outstanding natural beauty, and World Heritage Sites — roof extensions are not permitted development. You will need to apply for planning permission for any loft conversion in these locations, however modest the works may be.

Do I still need building regulations approval if my loft conversion is permitted development?

Yes, always. Permitted development rights grant a form of planning permission but they do not remove the requirement for building regulations approval. A loft conversion involves structural alterations, fire safety, insulation and means of escape, all of which are regulated under the building regulations. Contact your local building control body before starting work.

What is a Lawful Development Certificate and should I get one for my loft conversion?

A Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) is a formal decision by your local planning authority confirming that a proposed development is lawful and does not require a planning application. You are not obliged to obtain one, but it is strongly advisable: it provides certainty, protects you if enforcement questions arise later, and reassures solicitors and buyers if you sell your home.

SOURCES

- [GPDO 2015 Householder Technical Guidance — MHCLG](#)
- [GPDO 2015 — Class B roof enlargement conditions \(height and dormers\)](#)
- [Planning Portal — Loft conversion permitted development guidance](#)
- [GPDO 2015 — Class B volume limits and Article 2\(3\) exclusions](#)
- [Planning Practice Guidance — What are permitted development rights?](#)

- [GPDO 2015 — Schedule 1: Article 2\(3\) land definitions](#)
- [Planning Portal — Designated land and Article 4 direction guidance](#)