

Borough Planner's Service

June 1996



## Making More of Your Loft



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Planning Service





## Making more of your loft

Contents	page
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Planning Policy</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Ten key questions when planning your loft conversion</b>	
1 Is your loft space large enough?	2
2 Is your house / flat in a conservation area?	3
3 Is the roof clearly visible from the street?	4
4 Will your neighbours be able to see your roof extension?	5
5 Will the scheme affect your neighbours' amenities?	5
6 Do roofs make a special contribution to the area?	6
7 Have alterations to roofs already taken place?	8
8 Are the large scale details right?	9
9 Are the small scale details right?	11
10 What sort of roof have you got?	12
<b>Building Regulations - Points to Watch</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Roofs - terms and components</b>	<b>28</b>

### Contacts

If at any stage you are not sure about the advice or how it applies to you, the Area Planning Officer for your part of the Borough will be happy to help.

**Planning Enquiries** (020) 8871 6638

**Building Control** (020) 8871 7620

## Introduction

Loft conversions are a popular way of getting more room in your house or top floor flat. But one way or another you will need the Council's permission, so before you start you need to consider whether your house is suitable and the likelihood that your plans will meet the Council's requirements.

### Planning Permission

You will generally need planning permission if the house is in a conservation area and you will be altering the shape of the roof. Outside a conservation area you must get planning permission to extend the front of the roof or raise the height of the ridge or if you are extending the roof by more than a certain amount. You should always check first with the Council's Borough Planner's Service to find out whether you will need planning permission for your project.

### Building Regulations

You will certainly need building regulations approval and the Council's Building Control Section will tell you what is required. The Building Regulations impose certain structural and other requirements particularly where it comes to access stairs and this may limit what options are available to you. But in meeting these requirements the result may be a conflict with planning objectives concerning the external appearance of the proposed extension. It is important to find out as early as possible, as it may mean you will not easily get planning permission.

## Planning policy

The Council's planning policies relating to loft extensions are :

".....roof extensions should generally reflect the style, proportions, materials and details of the existing building.

Extensions should not be so large as to dominate and compete with the building."

"Roof extensions are not generally appropriate in the front of the house, particularly in a group of uniform design, unless they can be well set back behind an existing parapet with minimal impact on the street scene; dormers should be placed well away from eaves and flank or party walls and be below and not raise the height of the ridge."

The purpose of this leaflet is to help you plan your scheme so that you are more likely to be successful in getting what you want. It sets out simple guidance which describes the sort of things the Council will take into account when assessing your plans.

There are 2 main factors the Council's planners will be looking at:

- 1 The impact that your scheme may have on the amenities of your neighbours, e.g.
  - will they suffer a loss of daylight or sunlight to any of their rooms?
  - will they be overlooked from any windows in the new rooms you are proposing and how will this affect their privacy?
- 2 The impact that your scheme may have on the appearance of your house and on the area generally. This is important because other people will have to look at it and it becomes more of a public issue when a large number of people will be able to see it.

These two factors are explained more fully in the form of 10 questions which you should consider when planning your project. This will help you to understand the steps the Council will follow when considering your application for planning permission.

## 1 Is the loft space large enough?

Some roof types are generally more suited to conversion than others in terms of size, shape and construction. Some roof types are easier than others to convert.

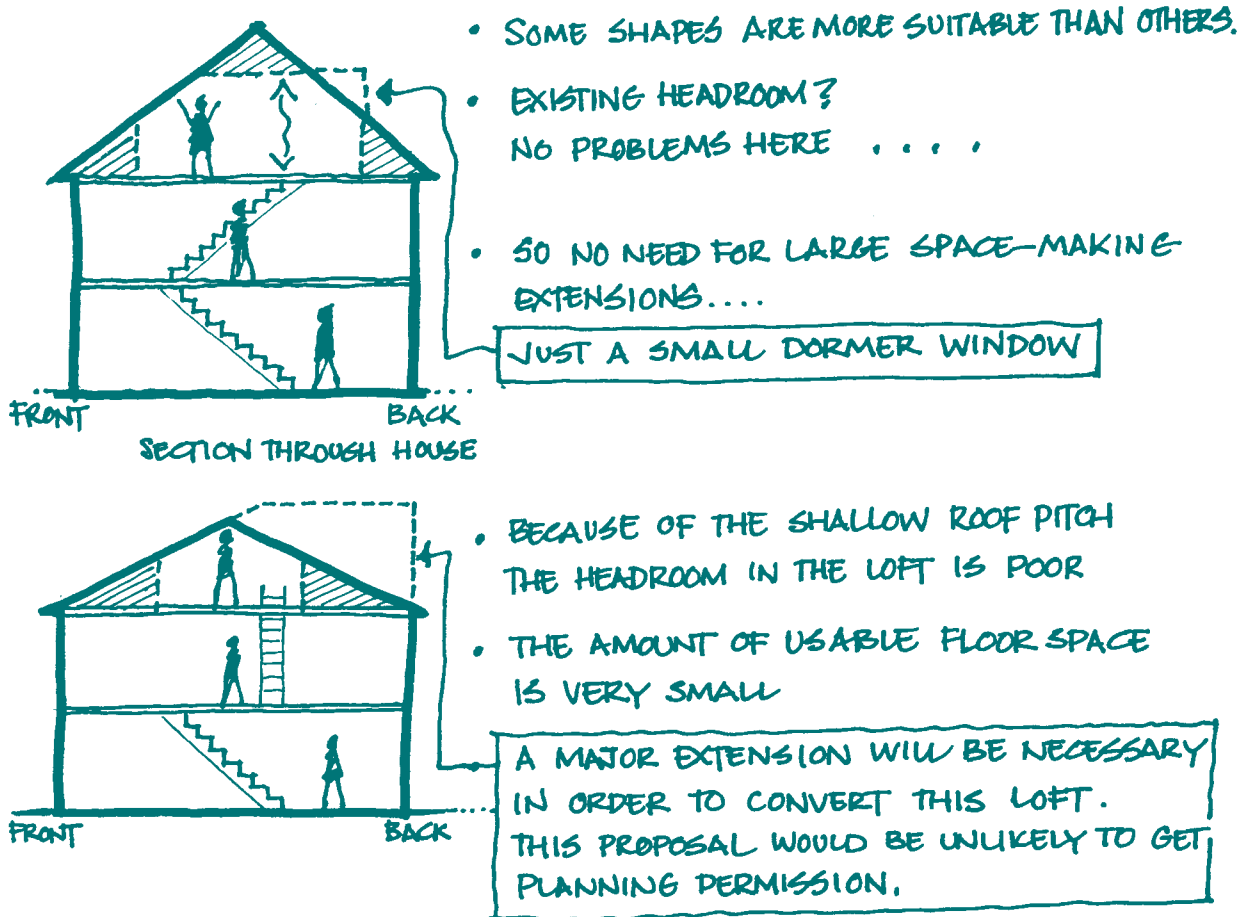
Ideally, your existing loft should be large enough to accommodate the room(s) you want without any need for major extensions. All you should then need are dormer windows - i.e. windows inserted into the sloping roof to light the space inside - or even just a roof-light.

More often though, roofs are extended to create headroom where none exists at present. Generally, there is no minimum ceiling height requirement in the Building Regulations, but a ceiling lower than 2.1m (7'0") will seem cramped. Remember also that a new structural floor and roof will have to be built and this means that the finished headroom will be about 300mm (1'0") less than the headroom you have in your loft at present. To achieve a reasonable amount of space with adequate headroom may mean major alterations to the loft which could alter the look of your house quite dramatically. This could mean that the scheme would be ruled out because of its poor appearance.

If you have a modern house with a trussed roof construction it may be possible to convert the loft space but you may find that it will be a complicated and expensive job.

How will access be gained to the loft space? In the case of many semi-detached and terraced houses the existing stairs are located beside a party wall. This means that the most efficient and logical location for the new stair into the loft is also against the party wall. Since the new stair must rise into that part of the loft where there is least head-room, it will be necessary to provide an extension to the roof right against the party wall. This is something we try to avoid because the extension would almost certainly look bulky and out of proportion to the roof.

The commonest problem is the need to extend the roof to accommodate the new access staircase and meet the building regulation requirement for headroom over the stairs of at least 1.9m. Often this depends on the shape as well as the height of the existing roof.



## 2 Is your house/flat in a conservation area?

There are more than 40 conservation areas in Wandsworth. You could be living in one of them.

Conservation areas are those parts of the borough which have a special character or are of historic interest. Changes to the appearance of buildings are closely scrutinised to ensure that the special quality of the area will be retained. If your house is in a conservation area any alterations to the roof should preserve or enhance the special character or appearance of that particular area. This may mean that the possibility for acceptable schemes is much more limited. It will depend on the type of roof you have, the amount you want to alter it and how visible that alteration will be.

### 3 Is the roof clearly visible from the street?

Take a good look at your roof. Can it be seen clearly from the street outside or from any neighbouring streets? If it can, then the appearance of your extension will be important because your roof is part of the street scene.

The roofs of end houses of terraces are more widely visible than the roofs of mid-terraced houses. Semi-detached and detached houses usually have roofs which are extensively visible from the street, and corner buildings are always prominent.

If you are proposing to alter the front of the roof or any other widely visible part then it will be more of an issue - especially if you live in a conservation area. Once again you will have to pay special attention to what it looks like from the outside.

CORNER AND END OF TERRACE HOUSES ARE PARTICULARLY PROMINENT . . . .



## 4 Will your neighbours be able to see your roof extension?

Generally, where gardens are longer it is possible to see more of the surrounding roofs.

Where the backs of buildings are closer, views of the roof are more likely to be confined to just a few of your neighbours but because they are closer their amenities may be more affected.



## 5 Will the scheme affect your neighbours' amenities?

It is important that your neighbours should not suffer unacceptable harm to the normal enjoyment of their homes as a result of your proposal. This could be:

- loss of privacy as a result of an unreasonable amount of overlooking.
- loss of daylight or sunlight.
- visual impact.

### Privacy

A new window (or windows) in your converted loft space could overlook one of your neighbours' windows and cause an unreasonable loss of privacy, especially where the room overlooked is a bedroom or living room.

If your extension would enable access to an existing flat roof or proposes a roof terrace or balcony feature this could seriously affect your neighbours' privacy. Roof terraces often allow unrestricted views over back gardens and into other people's windows which can be a nuisance. So, ensure that your scheme will not include new windows or a terrace which will enable you to see more of your neighbours!

### Daylight / Sunlight and Visual Intrusion

Sky views from buildings and back gardens are often limited and, depending on the orientation, your extension could cast extensive shadows over your neighbours' property. It is possible to measure the likely impact of your extension on your neighbours' sunlight and daylight but it is more difficult to assess whether it will have an overbearing effect. Look closely at the amount of sun that reaches your neighbour's house and garden and think how this might be affected by your scheme. Try to design a scheme which keeps any impact on your neighbour to a minimum.

## 6 Do roofs make a special contribution to the townscape of the area?

Where the roofs are a particularly attractive or distinctive feature of the area any alterations will need careful consideration in order to ensure that the special quality is protected.

If roofs are an important feature, what is it that makes them attractive or distinctive? Look at the roofs in your street.

### **Are they all the same?**

Many streets are composed of buildings with similar roof shapes. This regularity is often seen as an attractive feature. Will your proposal fit in or will it spoil the order of things by making your roof stick out like a sore thumb?

### **Are they all different?**

Sometimes there is a great deal of variation in the style and shape of roofs and perhaps a variation in the heights of buildings. It could be that this quality of variety between buildings contributes to making the area attractive. In these circumstances you should aim to maintain the variation by keeping the distinctive appearance of your house.



MANY TERRACES ARE ARRANGED IN FORMAL GROUPS WHERE SEVERAL INDIVIDUAL BUILDINGS ARE PART OF A SYMMETRICAL COMPOSITION. TERRACES LIKE THIS ARE AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE TOWNSCAPE AND ANY ALTERATIONS TO ROOFS WHICH WOULD BE LIKELY TO SPOIL THEIR QUALITY WILL BE REGISTERED.

OR THEY MAY BE SEMI-DETACHED PAIRS...



..... WHERE THE HIPPED ROOF FORM EMPHASISES THE GAPS BETWEEN THE PAIRS. A CLUMSY EXTENSION ON ONE HIP SPOILS THE ARRANGEMENT AND THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER

EVEN WHERE THERE IS CONSIDERABLE VARIETY BETWEEN BUILDINGS YOU SHOULD STILL THINK CAREFULLY.....



..... WILL YOUR PROPOSED EXTENSION BE HARMFUL TO THE APPEARANCE OF THE GROUP. EXISTING VARIETY DOES NOT MEAN 'ANYTHING GOES'!

## 7 Have alterations to roofs already taken place?

Where the existing roofscape has not been altered it is important to make sure alterations set a good example for the rest to follow. The good schemes can then be copied to ensure a consistently high standard. On the other hand just because a particularly bad alteration

has taken place this should not justify further harm by allowing similar alterations to occur. So don't look at a neighbour's ugly extension and use it as an excuse to do the same thing. Many very bad alterations were carried out before the legislation was tightened up.

By answering all these questions you should, by now, have a clearer idea of the general size and shape of extension which is likely to be acceptable. Now you can begin to consider the details of its appearance.

## 8 Are the large scale details right?

The large scale details are those which affect the size, shape and overall appearance of the extension. The scale and proportions of the extension should reflect those of the house. The objective should be to produce

an addition which looks as if it belongs to the house. The best schemes often go unnoticed because they appear to have always been there.

THE IDEAL EXTENSION SHOULD BE SIMPLE DORMERS ~

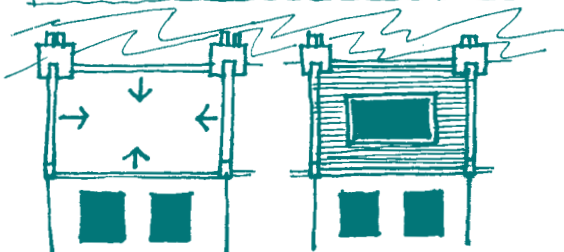


REAR VIEW.

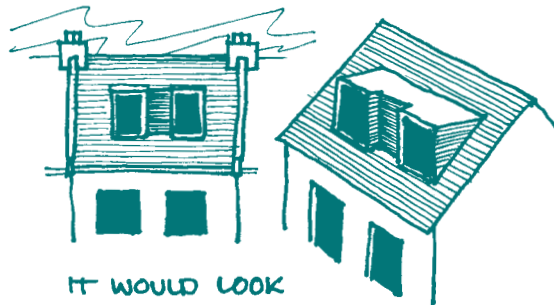
- THEY SHOULD BE REGULARLY SPACED, BUT NOT NECESSARILY IMMEDIATELY ABOVE THE WINDOWS BELOW.
- SIZE SHOULD BE SMALLER THAN THE WINDOWS ON THE TOP STOREY.
- IF THE BUILDING IS PLAIN - THE DORMERS SHOULD BE PLAIN AS WELL.

HOWEVER, SUCH A SIMPLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD EXTENSION IS RARELY POSSIBLE.

POLICY REQUIREMENTS ARE THAT DORMERS SHOULD BE PLACED WELL AWAY FROM EAVES AND FLANK OR PARTY WALLS AND BE BELOW THE RIDGE. THIS LEADS TO . . . .



. . . AN OVER LARGE BOX POORLY RELATED TO THE HOUSE.



IT WOULD LOOK BETTER IF IT WERE DETAILED TO LOOK LIKE TWO DORMERS.

AN EXTENSION BELOW RIDGE HEIGHT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE IN SOME ROOFS WHERE HEADROOM IS LIMITED. AS A RESULT EXTENSIONS CAN LOOK BULKY.



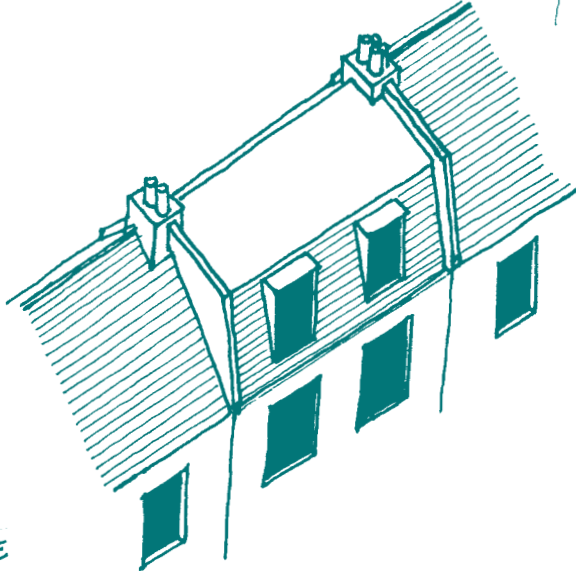
REAR VIEW



REAR VIEW

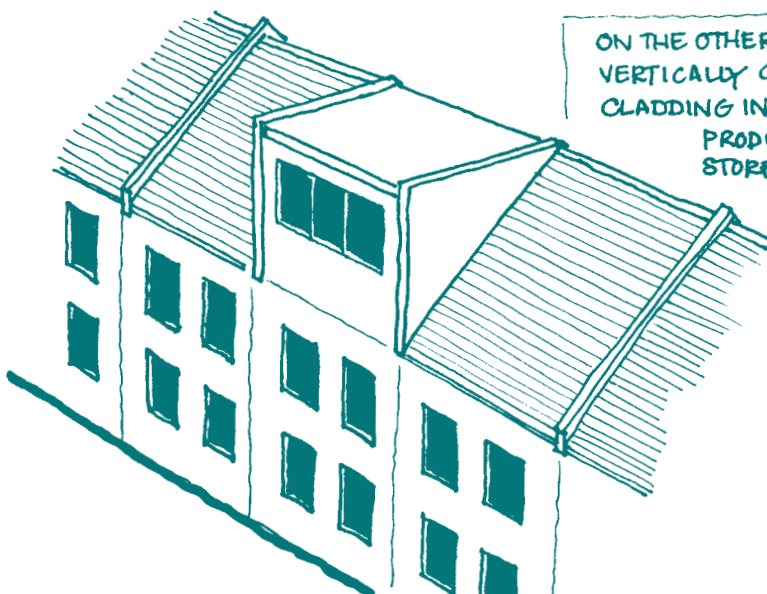
. . . . OR EVEN WORSE WHERE THE EXTENSION SITS ON THE EAVES AS WELL . . . . .

• IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS — ON MID TERRACED HOUSES WHERE THE REAR ROOF SLOPE CAN'T BE WIDELY SEEN — AN EXTENSION WHICH RUNS BETWEEN THE PARTY WALLS MAY BE APPROPRIATE



- FLAT ROOF EXTENDS BACK FROM RIDGE
- REAR ROOF SLOPES BACK AT 70°
- PARTY WALLS BUILT UP ON EACH SIDE
- DORMER WINDOWS PROJECT FROM SLOPING ROOF SECTION.

THE APPEARANCE OF AN EXTENSION LIKE THIS CAN BE BETTER BECAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE HOUSE RATHER THAN AN UNRELATED ADDITION. SO IN SOME RESPECT IT ACCORDS WITH THE POLICY OBJECTIVE — ALTHOUGH LARGE IT DOES NOT 'DOMINATE' THE HOUSE AND DORMER WINDOWS CAN BE RELATED TO EXISTING FENESTRATION PATTERN.



ON THE OTHER HAND — BUILDING UP VERTICALLY ON THE BACK AND CLADDING IN TILE OR SLATE WILL PRODUCE A BULKY EXTRA STOREY WHICH SPOILS THE LOOK OF THE HOUSE

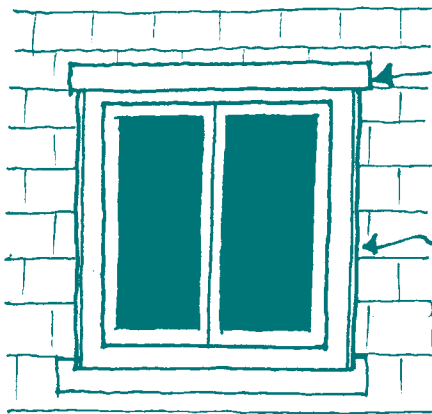
## 9 Are the small scale details right?

The small scale details should be copied from the house. This means repeating where possible the type of construction and materials found in the original construction. If you can't copy from the house then look for a building of the same style and period and replicate the feature you want from this example.

You may wish to deliberately go for a contemporary design where the new work stands out from the old. This will require exceptional skill on the part of the designer to ensure that the whole building remains a harmonious and attractive composition.

- SMALL SCALE DETAILS ARE IMPORTANT TO THE SUCCESS OF A SCHEME. GENERALLY, DORMER WINDOWS SHOULD BE AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE AND PROBLEMS ARISE THROUGH CLUMSY DETAILING.

### THE RIGHT WAY ~

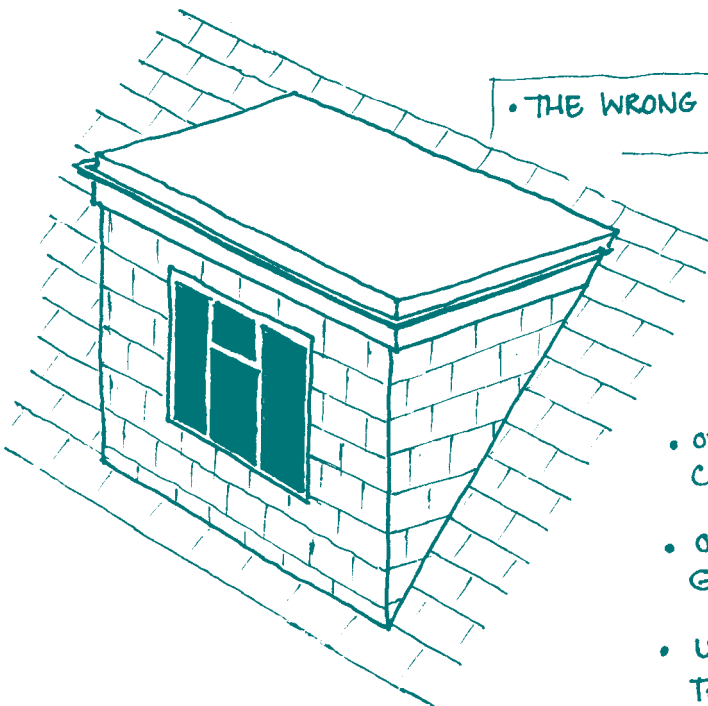


FASCIA VERY SMALL - ONLY A SIMPLE MOULDING TO COVER THE EDGE OF THE FLAT LEAD ROOF. A GUTTER IS RARELY NEEDED IF THE ROOF OF THE DORMER IS MADE TO FALL BACK TO THE MAIN ROOF

THE THICKNESS OF THE CHEEKS OR SIDES OF THE DORMER SHOULD BE ONLY SLIGHTLY WIDER THAN THE WINDOW FRAME. THE CHEEKS SHOULD BE IN LEAD OR SOMETIMES CLAY TILES (WHERE THE MAIN ROOF IS CLAY TILE).

- A GASH WINDOW OR SIMPLE CASEMENT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE, CHOICE DEPENDS ON THE STYLE OF THE HOUSE.

### • THE WRONG WAY TO DO IT ~



- OVER SIZED STRUCTURE CLAD IN SLATE OR TILE
- OVER-SIZED FASCIA AND GUTTER.
- UGLY PROPORTIONS SPOIL THE ROOF AND THE HOUSE.

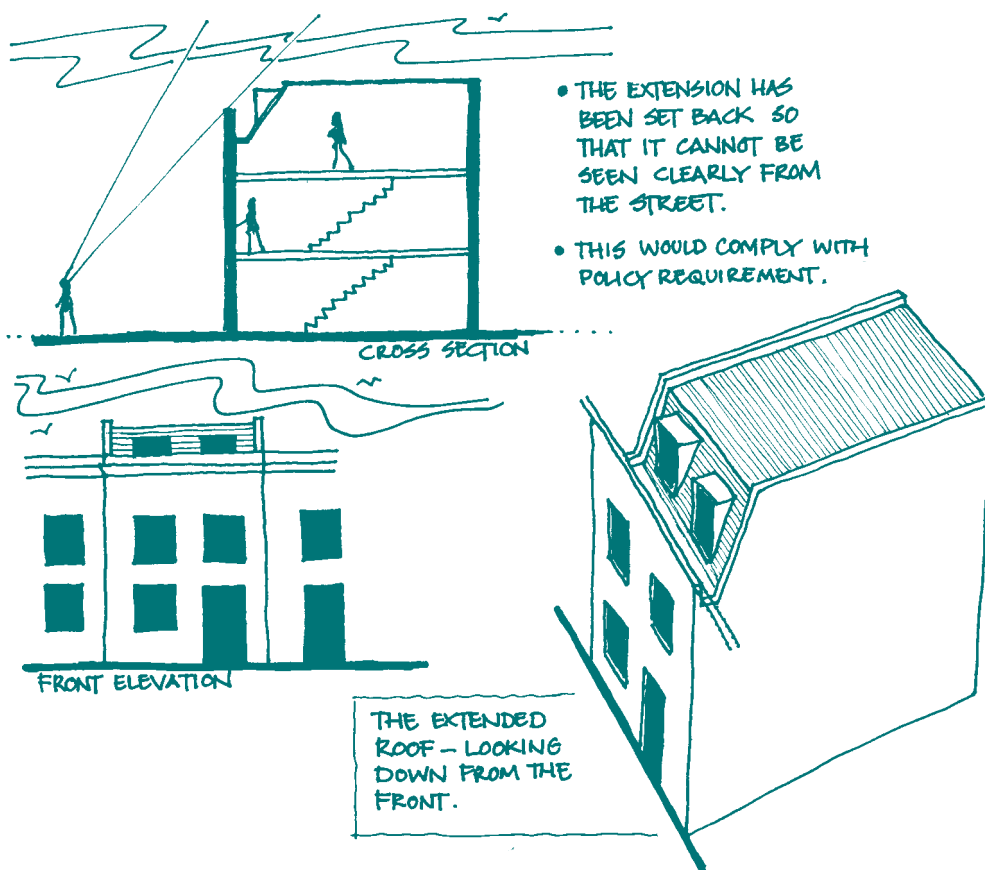
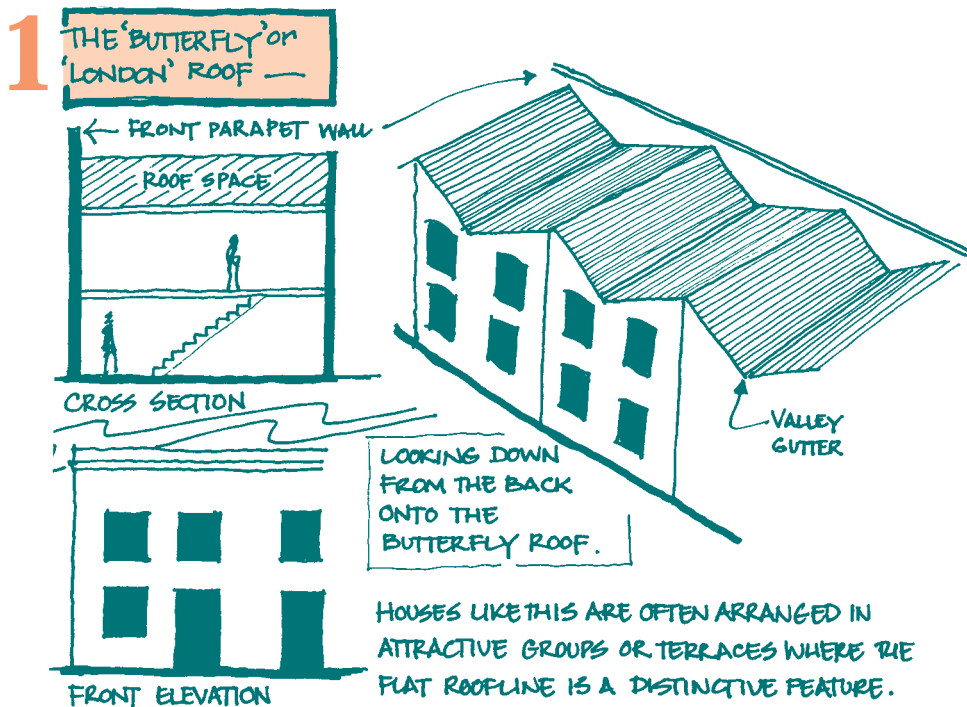
## 10 What sort of roof have you got?

The sketches below show some typical roof types and explain how to avoid planning problems and design a successful loft conversion.

These sketches show what can be done but there may be reasons why you cannot do what is shown here.

For instance

- where the roofs are a fine feature of the area, especially in a conservation area - see page 6 or
- where the extension would be particularly prominent and look out of place eg. on a corner house - see page 4



## 2 THE HIPPED ROOF

• THE HOUSE ON THE LEFT HAS A STEEPLY PITCHED ROOF WHICH OFFERS GREATER POTENTIAL FOR A SUCCESSFUL LOFT CONVERSION.



• THE SHALLOW PITCH (RIGHT) HAS MUCH MORE LIMITED POTENTIAL .....

... THIS SORT OF INSENSITIVE EXTENSION FAILS TO MEET PLANNING POLICY REQUIREMENTS AND WILL BE RESISTED.

• DO NOT EXTEND ACROSS THE HIP OF THE ROOF

A CRUDE 'BOX' IMPOSED ON THE ROOF DOMINATES THE BUILDING AND SPOILS ITS APPEARANCE



VIEW FROM THE BACK

• YOU COULD CONSIDER .....

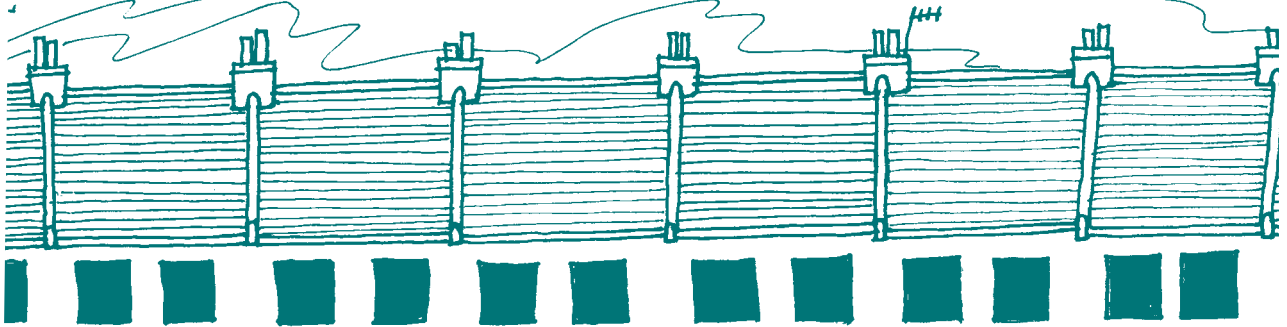


• THIS WOULD BE A MORE SYMPATHETIC APPROACH ..... BUT EVEN THIS MAY NOT BE RIGHT - SEE QUESTIONS 2 & 6



TURNING THE HIP INTO A GABLE MAY WORK BUT YOU MUST CONSIDER VERY CAREFULLY HOW THIS WOULD AFFECT THE LOOK OF YOUR HOUSE AND THE GROUP (AGAIN, LOOK AT QUESTION 6)

### 3 THE PITCHED ROOF ON THE STANDARD TERRACED HOUSE



← YOU WILL NEED A RESCUE WINDOW AT THE FRONT BUT THIS CAN BE IN THE ROOFSLOPE.

- ON A GROUP OF TERRACED HOUSES DORMER WINDOWS ON THE FRONT ROOF SLOPE CAN LOOK QUITE OUT OF PLACE.
- THE ADVICE IN POLICY IS TO AVOID EXTENSIONS AND DORMERS AT THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE.

BUT AT THE BACK . . . .



.....ON A MID TERRACED HOUSE A SUBSTANTIAL EXTENSION IS POSSIBLE.

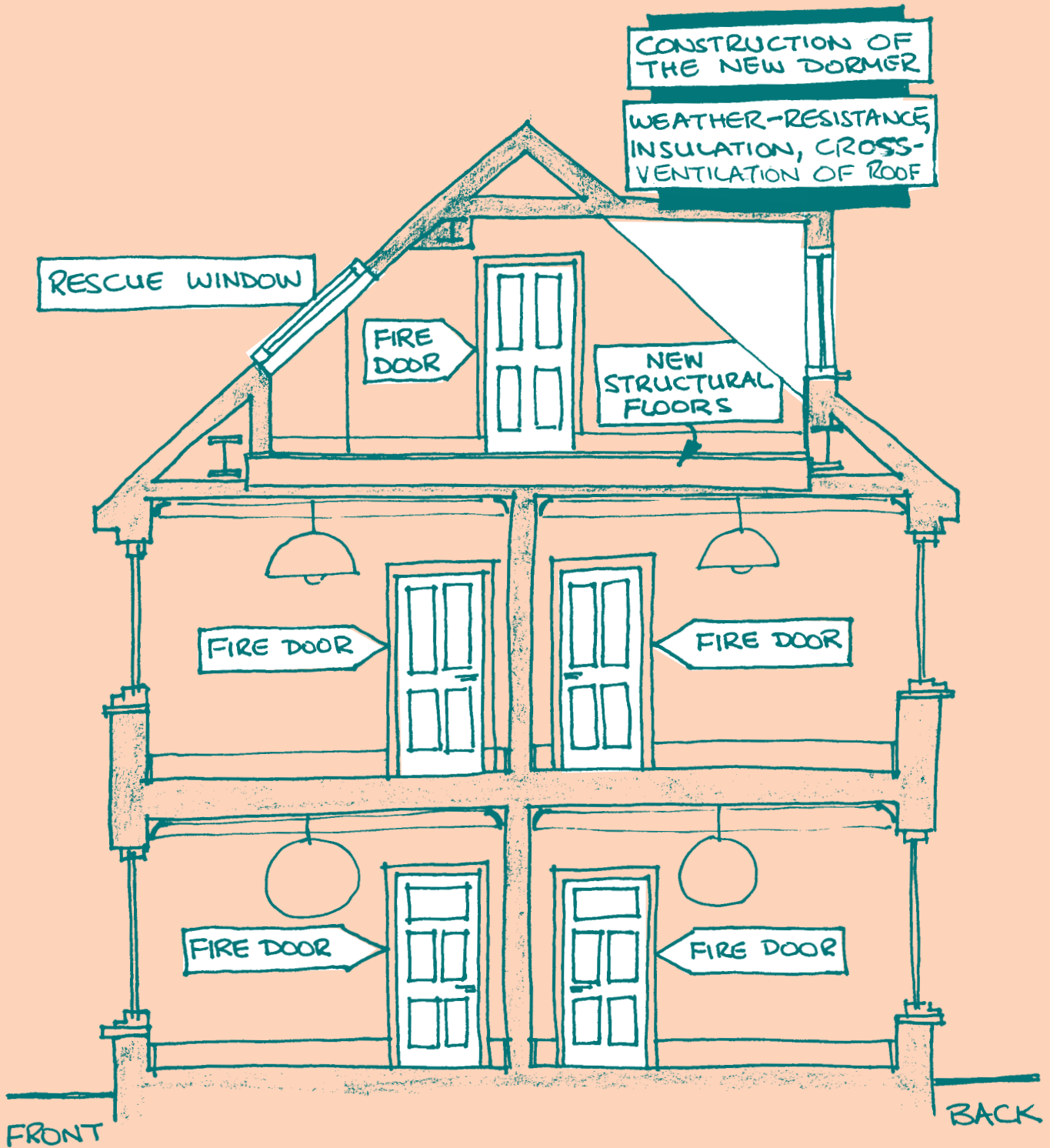


- IDEALLY SMALL WELL PLACED DORMERS (RIGHT) ARE MUCH BETTER THAN THE OVERSIZED 'BOX' EXTENSION (LEFT).



## The Building Regulations

## Points to watch



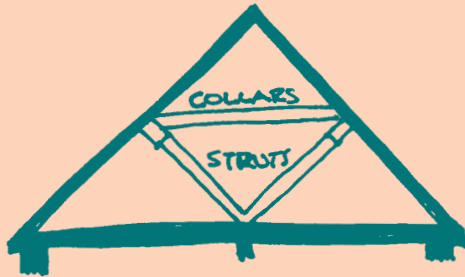
# LOFT CONVERSIONS

## Points to watch



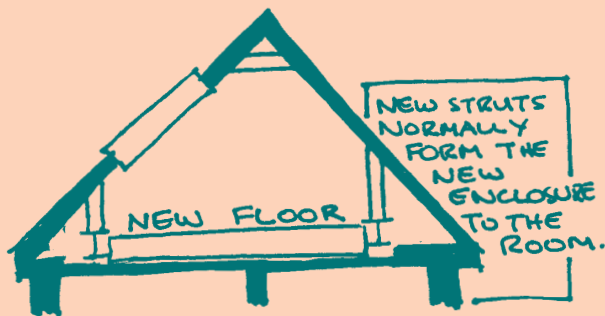
# LOFT CONVERSIONS

Points to watch



TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF YOUR LOFT SPACE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO REMOVE THE ROOF STRUTS AND COLLARS.....

WHICH ARE THE SUPPORTS FOR THE RAFTERS AND ROOF TILES

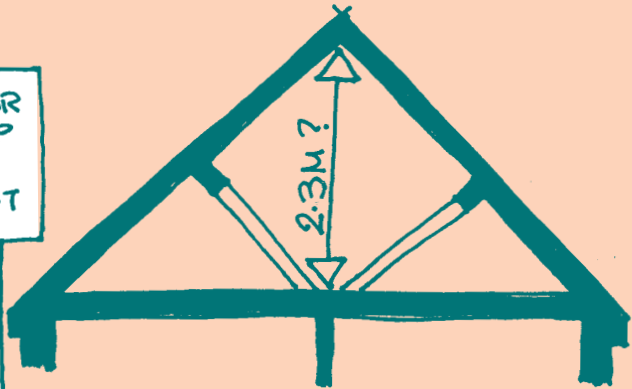


AND THE OLD CEILING JOISTS WHICH YOU'VE STORED THINGS ON FOR YEARS..... WON'T BE BIG ENOUGH TO SUPPORT A NEW FLOOR!

**REMEMBER!**

WHEN THE NEW FLOOR GOES IN, IT TAKES UP TO 175MM OF THE HEIGHT OF THE LOFT

THE CEILING-HEIGHT OF A SUCCESSFUL LOFT CONVERSION WOULD BE AT LEAST **2.1M** SO YOU WILL NEED ABOUT **2.3M** IN THE OLD LOFT SPACE

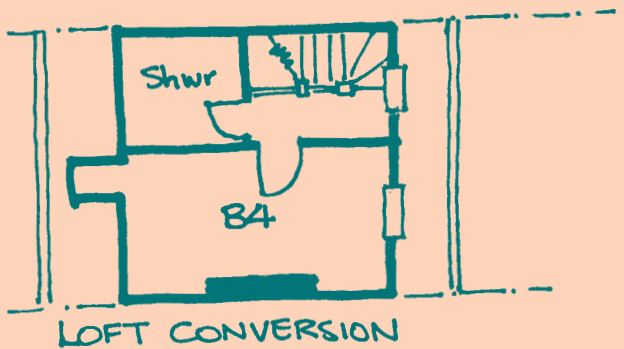
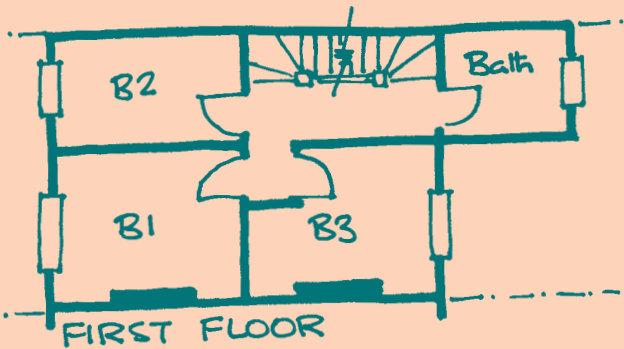
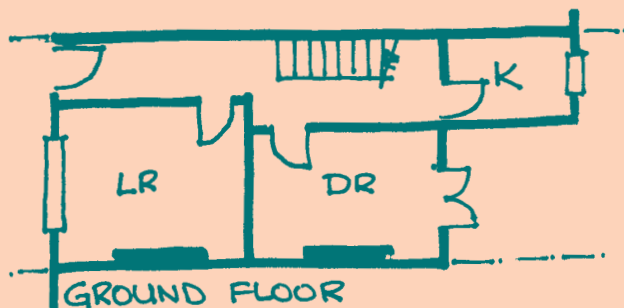


TO ACHIEVE A SATISFACTORY FIRE RESISTANCE, IT IS LIKELY THAT LATH-AND-PLASTER CEILINGS WILL HAVE TO BE REPLACED OR UPGRADED

**THE NEW FLOOR**

Points to watch

A FULL STAIRCASE ENCLOSURE FROM THE NEW LOFT ROOMS DOWN TO THE FRONT DOOR PROVIDES AN ESCAPE ROUTE SHOULD A FIRE START.....



USUALLY, THIS IS ALREADY PARTLY IN PLACE

AND IS FORMED BY THE HALLWAY AND LANDING

SO, THE ONLY ADDITIONAL WALLS NEEDED ARE THOSE IN THE NEW LOFT, AROUND THE NEW STAIRCASE

THE NEW WALLS SHOULD BE BUILT TO 1/2 HOUR FIRE RESISTANT STANDARD

IN THIS EXAMPLE, TYPICAL OF MANY LOFT CONVERSIONS SPACE AT THE FRONT OF THE NEW STAIRS COULD BE USED AS A SMALL SHOWER-WC

STAIRCASE ENCLOSURE

## Points to watch



FIRE RESISTING DOORS ARE VITAL TO CONTAIN SMOKE AND FIRE IN A ROOM FOR SUFFICIENT TIME FOR YOU TO BECOME AWARE OF THE FIRE AND EVACUATE THE BUILDING

THERE MUST BE A 1/2 HOUR FIRE-RESISTANT PARTITION TO SEPARATE THE LANDING FROM THE ROOMS IN THE NEW LOFT CONVERSION

THE DOORS IN THE LOFT CONVERSION MUST BE 1/2 HOUR FIRE CHECK DOORS AND BE FITTED WITH A DOOR CLOSER.....

SAFETY  FIRST

GENERALLY, THE EXISTING DOORS OFF THE HALLWAY AND LANDING WILL GIVE SUFFICIENT FIRE RESISTANCE, BUT WILL HAVE TO BE FITTED WITH A DOOR CLOSER.....

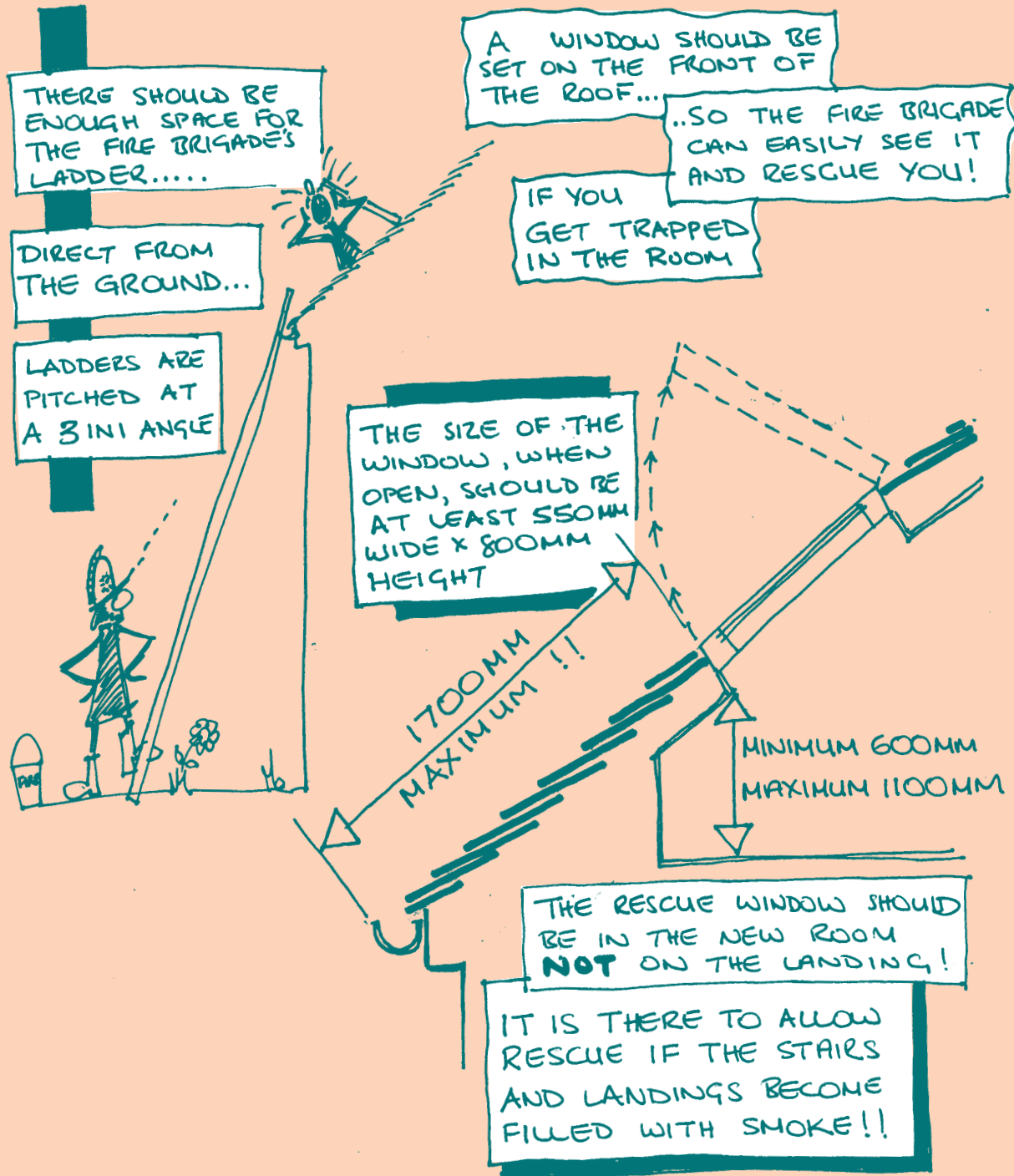
REMEMBER!  
A FIRE CHECK DOOR CANNOT WORK UNLESS IT IS CLOSED!

ANY GLASS IN FANLIGHTS OR IN THE DOOR NEEDS REPLACING WITH WIRED OR LAMINATED GLASS!



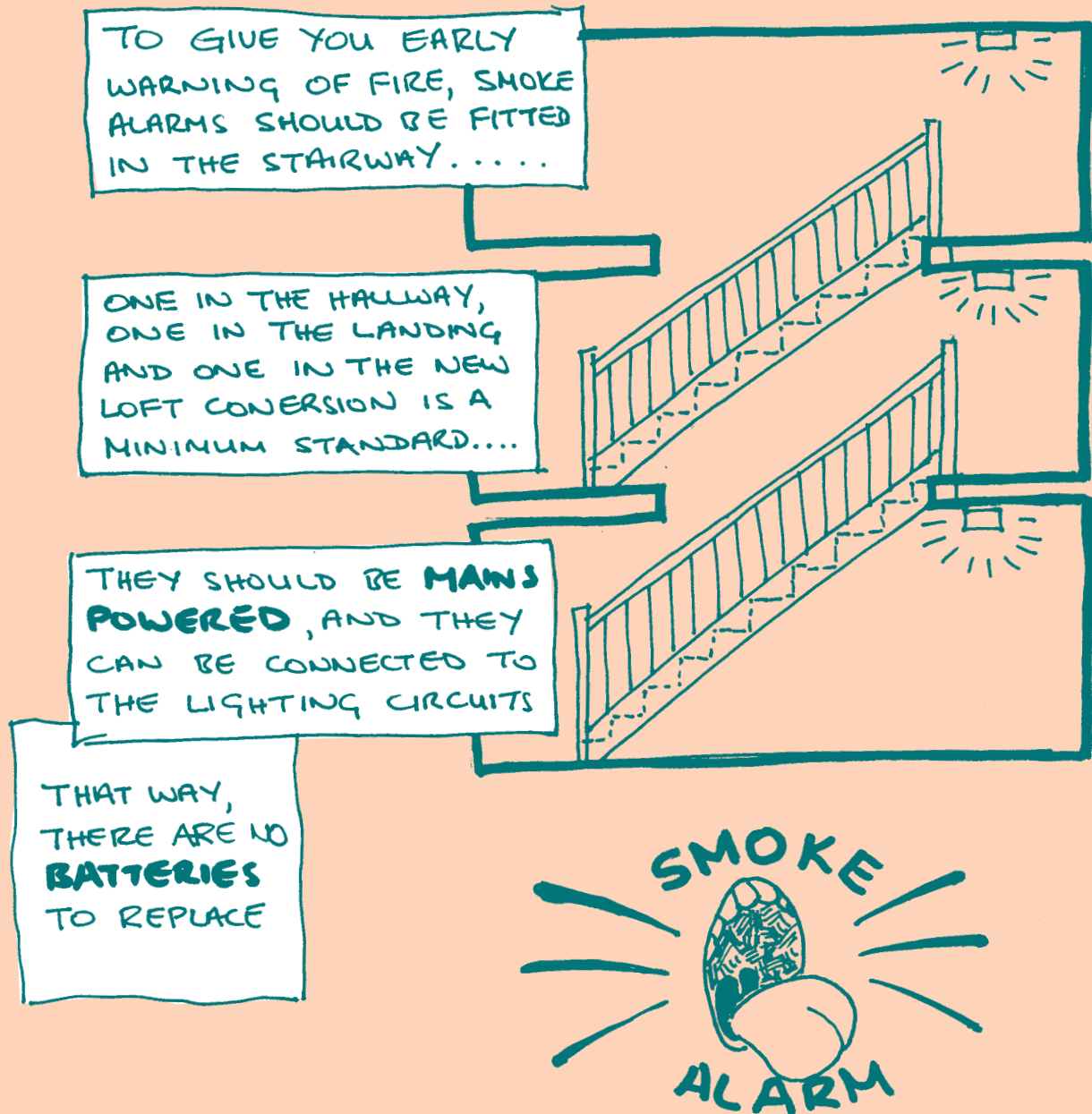
# FIRE DOORS

## Points to watch



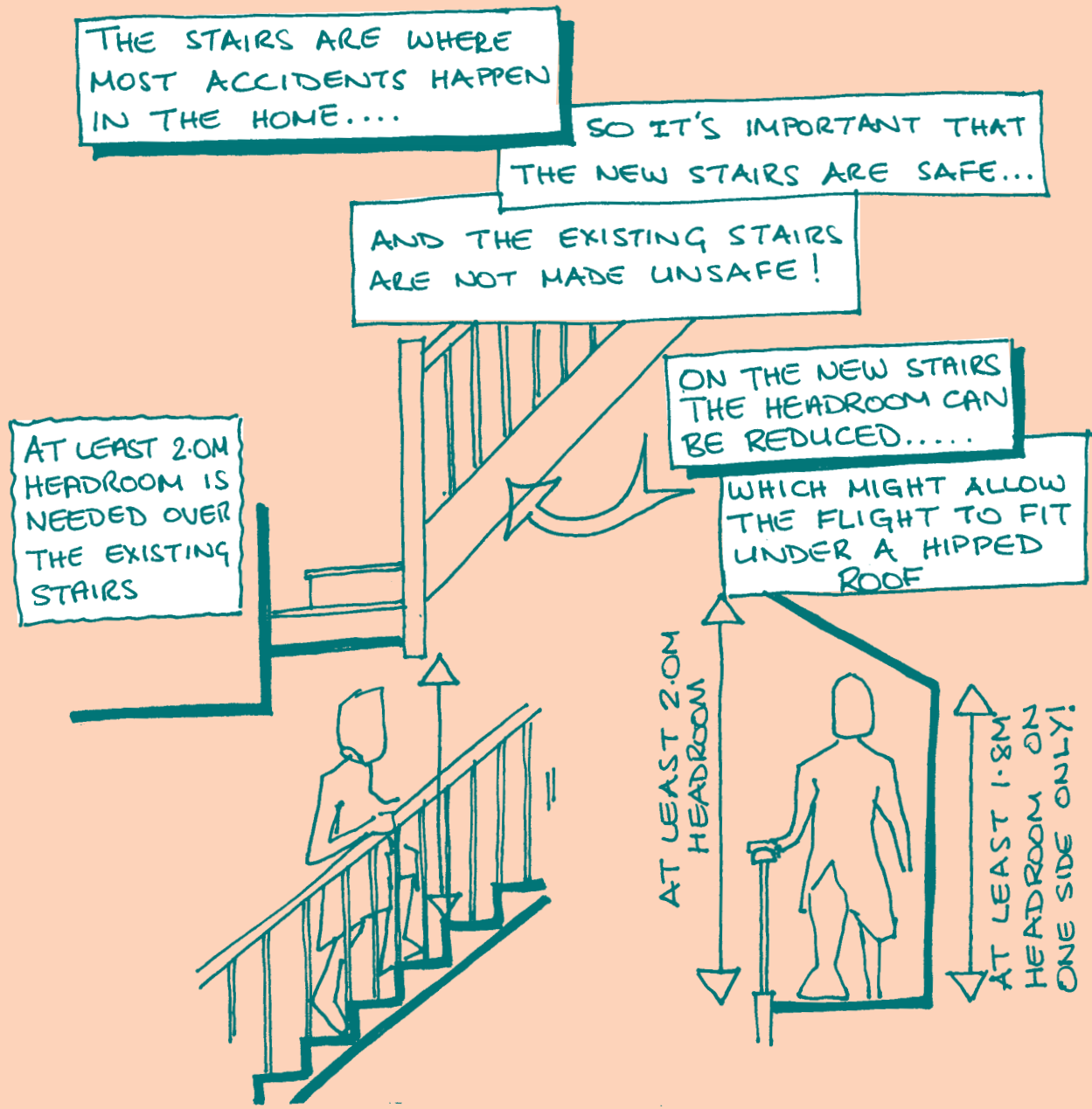
# RESCUE WINDOWS

## Points to watch



# SMOKE ALARMS

## Points to watch

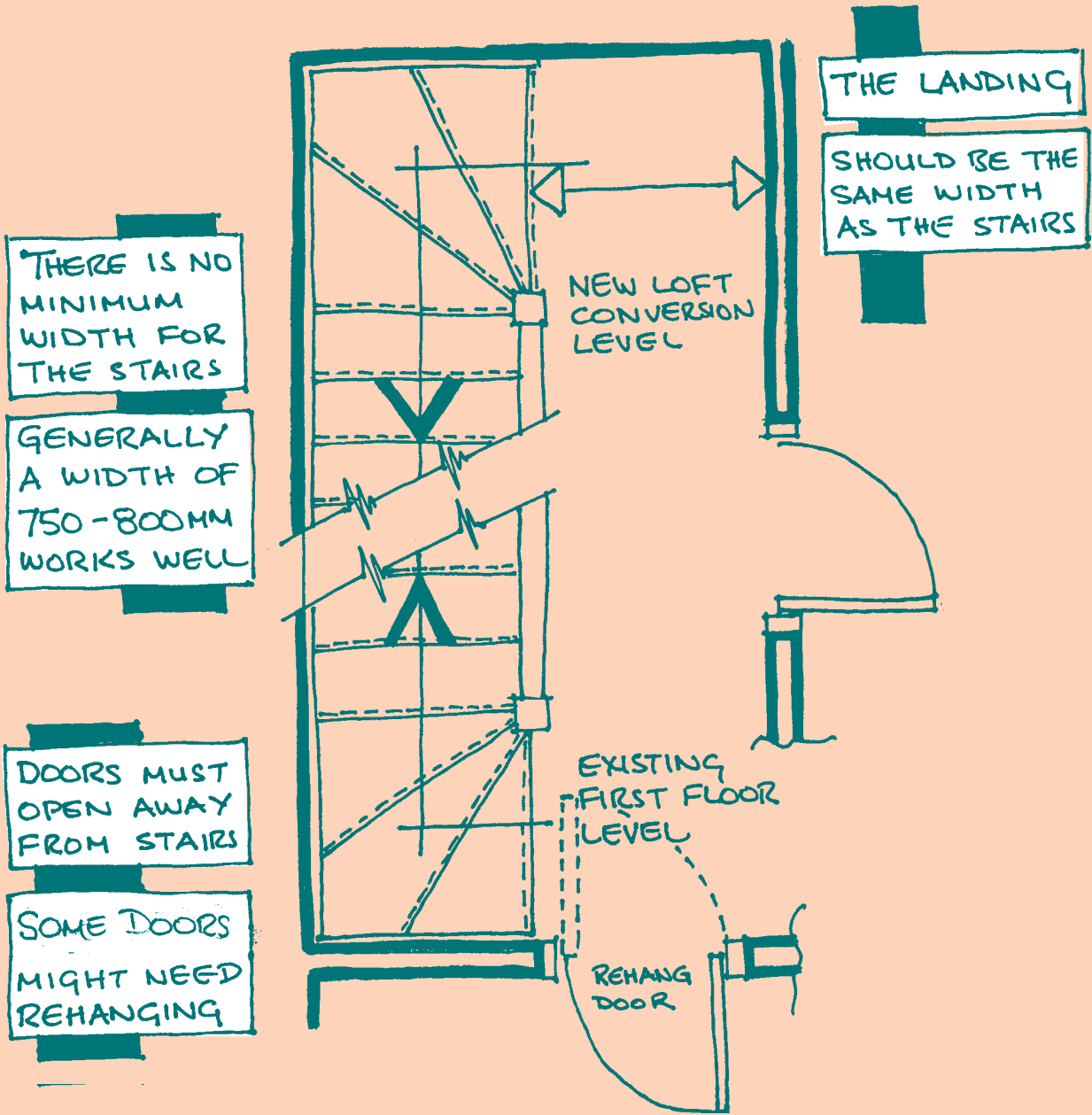


# STAIRCASES

1

## Points to watch

THIS IS A TYPICAL STAIRCASE PLAN BUT THERE ARE MANY VARIATIONS!

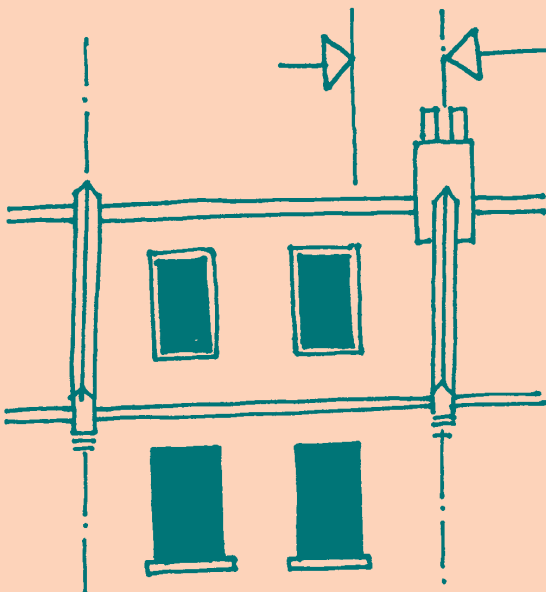


# STAIRCASES

2

Points to watch

A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS APPLY TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF DORMERS



IF THE DORMER IS LESS THAN 1.0M FROM THE PARTY WALL

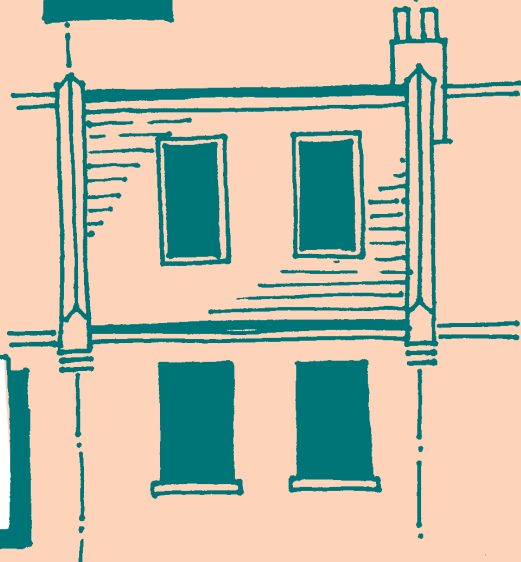
THE SIDE OF THE DORMER MUST PROVIDE 1/2 HOUR FIRE RESISTANCE FROM BOTH SIDES . . . .

IN OTHER WORDS, THE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE CONSTRUCTIONS MUST EACH PROVIDE 1/2 HOUR FIRE RESISTANCE.

IF YOU ARE PLANNING A MANSARD WHERE THE PARTY WALLS WILL BE EXTENDED, YOU MUST OBTAIN THE AGREEMENT OF YOUR NEIGHBOURS

REMEMBER!

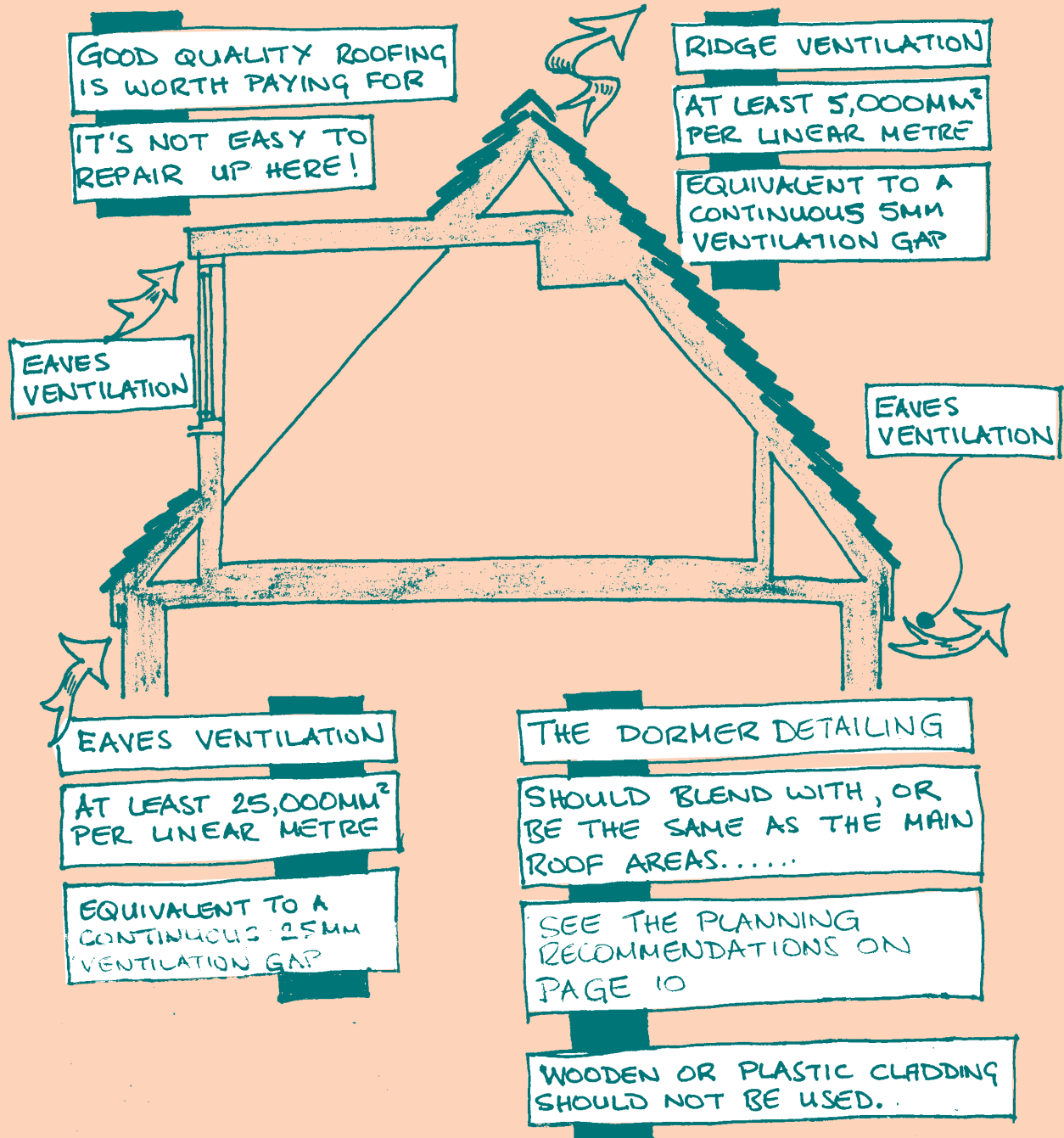
THE PARTY WALLS ARE JOINTLY OWNED BY YOU AND YOUR NEIGHBOURS. YOU SHOULD OBTAIN WRITTEN CONSENT FROM THEM!



THE NEW DORMER

1

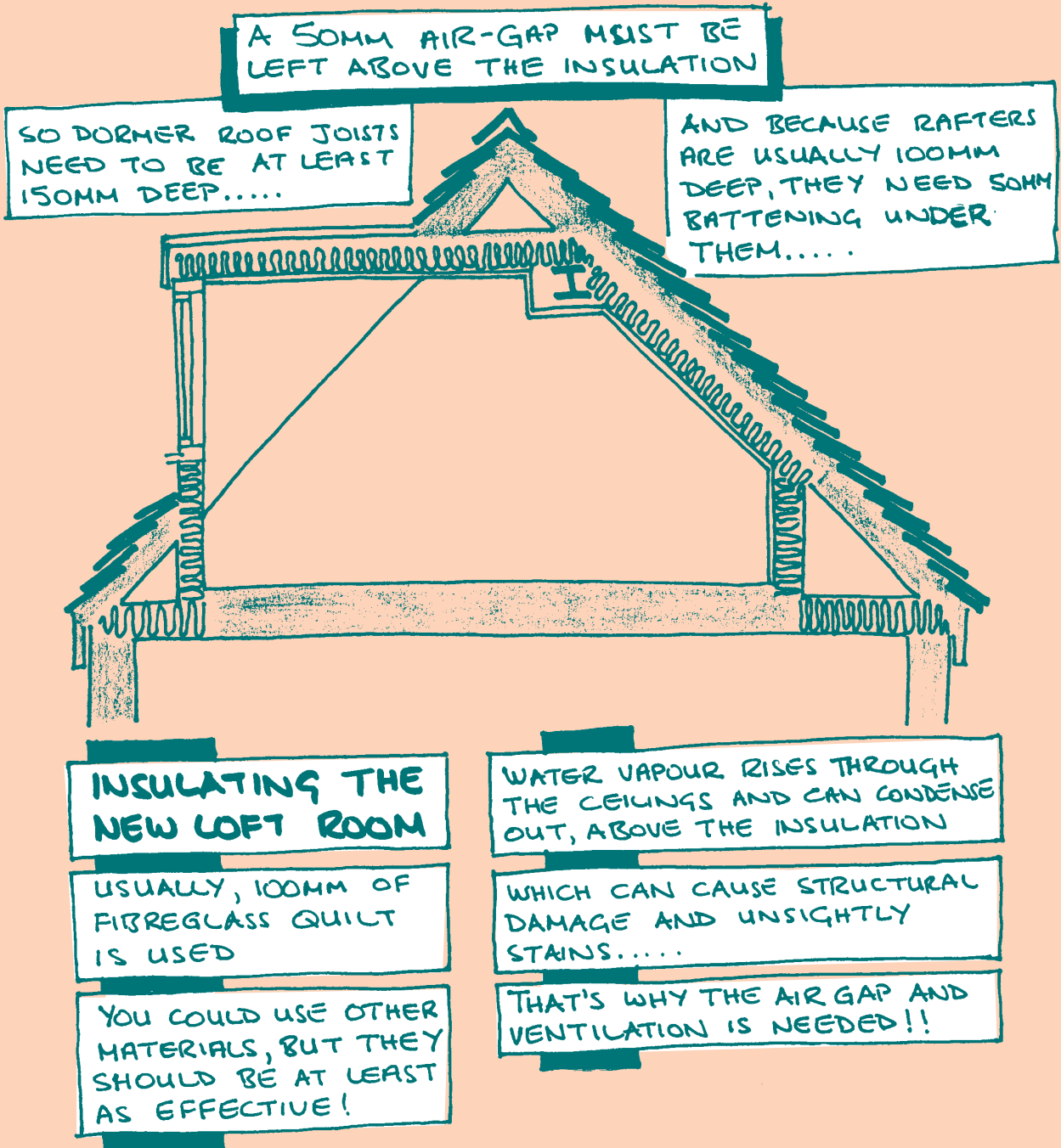
## Points to watch



# THE NEW DORMER

2

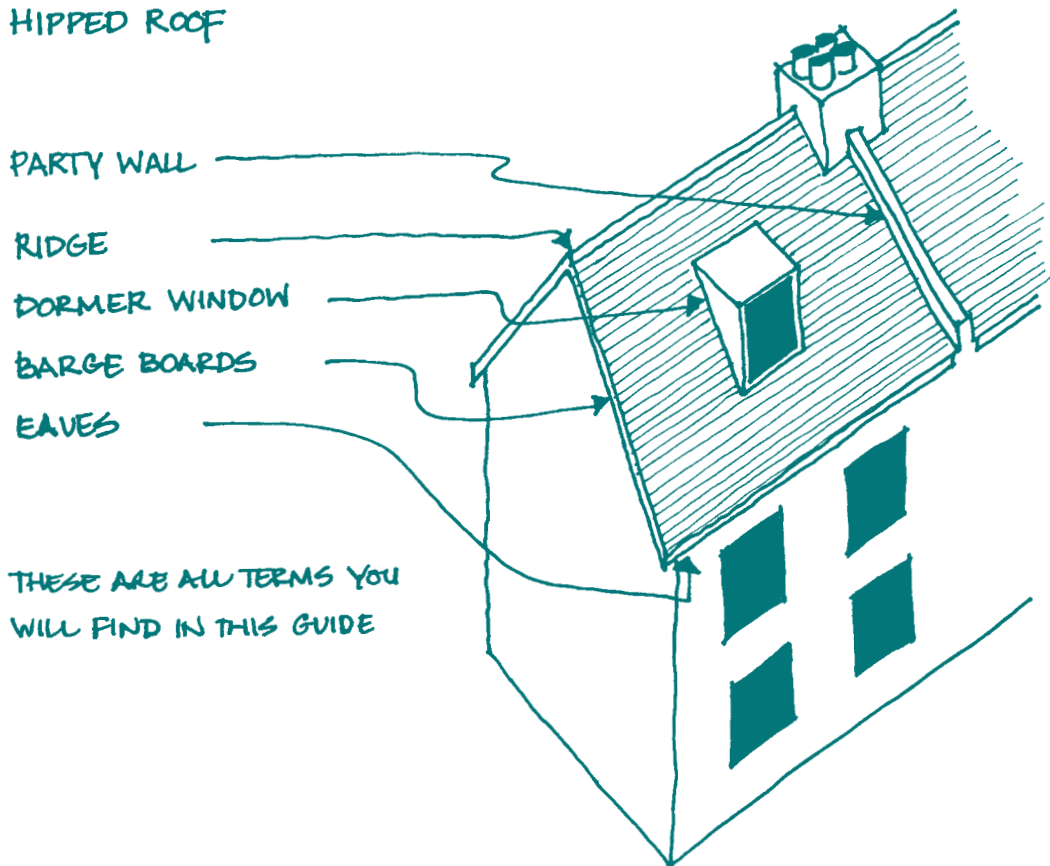
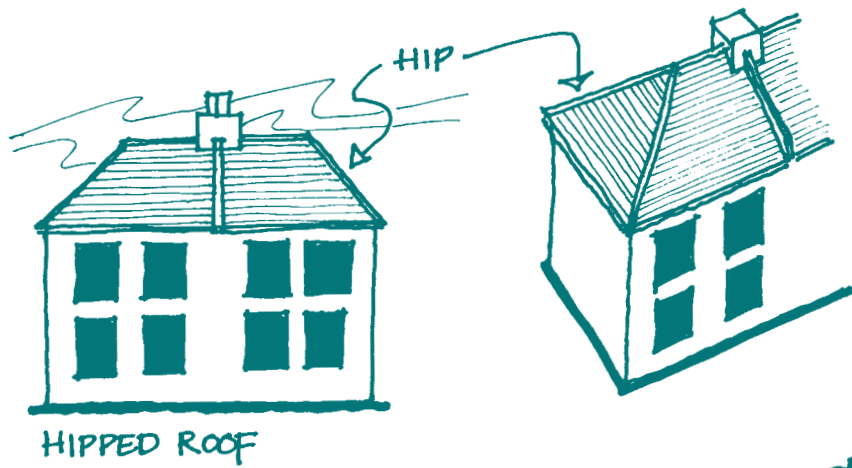
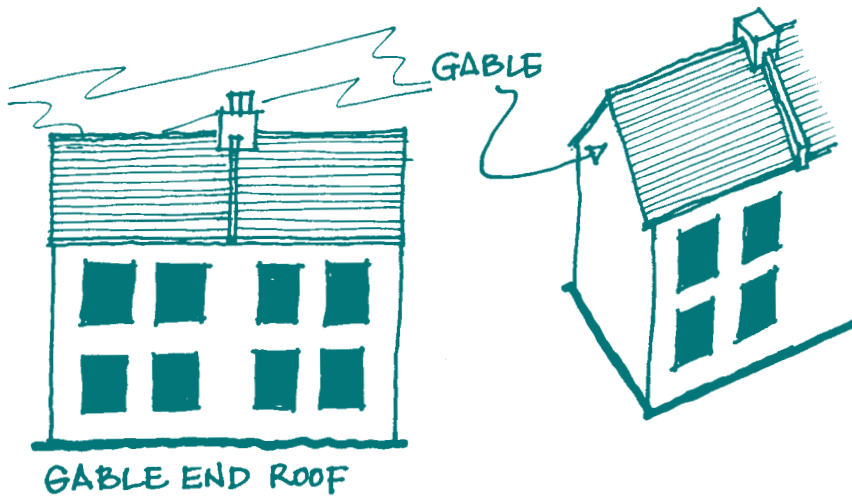
Points to watch



THE NEW DORMER

3

## Roofs - terms and components







Designed and produced by the Corporate Communications Unit  
Wandsworth Council  
DP 175 (rev.10.00)