

How easy will it be to convert my attic space?

MARK DAVIES ASK THE EXPERT



A reader writes: I'd like to convert the attic in my house, which I bought in 2004, but the beams seem very low. Is it possible that my attic is not convertible, or can you offer advice about converting it to living space please?

While some attic spaces are too small to be converted into habitable space, the vast majority can be changed. Converting attic space into a useful room is a great way of adding significant value to your home, of up to 20%.

Most families choose to convert attic space without having to endure the expense and trouble of moving out of their home. Work taking place in the attic can be less disruptive than, say, a big extension.

This extra living space created can be used for another bedroom, office, gym or entertainment room, with built-in storage in the eaves.

Generally, attic conversions cost between €11,000 and €20,000, depending on the size and how the finished room will be fitted out.

Any alterations or additions to a house must comply with planning laws and building regulations. There are several exemptions under the planning laws that allow small-scale improvements to be carried out without

requiring planning permission, such as extensions of up to 40 sq metres to the rear of homes, or attic conversions.

Check with your local authority or a registered architect, engineer or building surveyor to make sure you can convert your attic without planning permission. If you want to change the building to the back or front of the house, with a dormer window, for example, you will need permission.

However, I would not let this deter you, as a dormer can give extra volume to the space.

Ensure that all works carried out on your home, whether or not they are exempt from planning permission, are done in compliance with building regulations. This makes sure that the works being carried out are to a minimum standard and are safe for the occupants. It is important that a registered architect, engineer or building surveyor gives a certificate of compliance for the attic conversion.

I would advise that you think about how you want to use the space. Consider who you would like to do the work and get at least three quotes from experienced builders, based on measurements. Recommendations from previous satisfied customers can go a long way.

Next, you should consider the planning, party wall and building regulations requirements of your conversion. Pre-empt the pitfalls with your chosen contractor. Get a contract in place for the works with your contractor and architect so you know who is responsible for what.

Once you are ready to begin, be sure to inform your insurer that you are undertaking building works so that your cover is not affected.

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