

North Tyneside Design Code: Residential Conversions



North
Tyneside
Council

The residential conversion of redundant or disused buildings can provide much needed homes and is often an environmentally sustainable form of development. However, some conversions, whether individually or cumulatively, can harm the character of an area by undermining mixed and sustainable communities.

Every conversion is unique. A clear understanding of the original building, including its structure, materials, method of construction, and sensitivity to change, should guide the design approach. Buildings suitable for conversion may include churches, agricultural buildings, industrial buildings, shops, offices, warehouses, large houses, and outbuildings. Not all buildings are suitable for residential use, and it is important that the size, layout, and physical characteristics of the property can provide an acceptable standard of accommodation.

Not all conversions require planning permission. Where permission is not required, developers are encouraged to follow these design codes as best practice to achieve well-designed homes. Some proposals may still require Prior Approval, and early engagement with the local planning authority is recommended. A fee applies to the Council's pre-application advice service.

Objectives

- a) Respect and enhance the character and form of the original building.
- b) Respond positively to the local character.
- c) Contribute towards well designed, high quality and attractive places and buildings.
- d) Protect the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.
- e) Provide high quality accommodation for future occupiers.
- f) Support the creation of healthy neighbourhoods.

Residential conversions will be considered well designed when the following design codes are followed. Any deviation must be supported by clear evidence explaining why an alternative approach is the most appropriate for the site. Precedent is not a valid justification. Planning applications are assessed on their own merits, against current planning policy and adopted guidance, which may change over time.

RC 1 **Quality of accommodation**

Conversions must provide well-designed accommodation that is appropriately sized, accessible, and offers a good outlook, with rooms of suitable shape and layout. Main habitable rooms should receive adequate daylight, have an outlook that provides a reasonable sense of openness and avoids undue overlooking of blank walls or poorly designed spaces, and ensure suitable levels of privacy. Habitable rooms include living areas, kitchens and bedrooms.



Large existing windows and open layouts maximise daylight, outlook and usable space, demonstrating how conversions can deliver high-quality habitable rooms.

RC 2

Subdivision

Where existing spaces are subdivided, layouts should seek to avoid blocking or cutting across existing windows. Where changes to window positions or the external façade are required, these should be carefully designed to maintain or enhance the character and appearance of the building.



The layout and ceiling heights respond to the position and proportions of the original windows, ensuring that internal subdivision does not compromise daylight or the character of the space.

RC 3

Roof space conversion

Living accommodation within the roof space should provide sufficient headroom to create a comfortable and usable living environment. As a guide, a floor-to-ceiling height of around 2.3 metres should be achieved across a substantial proportion of the gross internal area, reflecting the principles of the Nationally Described Space Standard. Variations in ceiling height may be acceptable where they respond to the form of the roof, provided the space remains functional and areas of low headroom are limited.

There should be adequate natural light and a satisfactory outlook. Cross-section drawings should accompany applications to demonstrate that the internal space is acceptable.

RC 4 **Layout and noise mitigation**

The design and layout of homes should minimise the impact of noise between neighbouring dwellings and support a high standard of residential amenity. While Building Regulations set minimum acoustic performance standards, these should be complemented by careful internal planning.

Room layouts should be arranged to reduce noise transfer where practicable. This will typically include aligning similar room types vertically (such as kitchens above kitchens and bedrooms above bedrooms) and locating noise-sensitive spaces such as living rooms and bedrooms away from potential noise sources, including lifts and plant rooms.

RC 5 **Services**

Upgrades to building services should be designed to minimise their visual impact on the exterior of the building, making use of existing openings wherever possible. New pipework and cabling should be routed internally to avoid unnecessary additions to external elevations. Where external elements are required, these should be carefully positioned and designed to minimise their visibility, particularly from principal elevations and public viewpoints. All external service elements must be shown on proposed elevation drawings.

RC 6**Space Standards**

Unit sizes should have regard to the Nationally Described Space Standards.

All residential planning drawings must clearly show:

- a) Internal floor areas,
- b) Key room dimensions, particularly for bedrooms and principal living spaces.
- c) Indicative furniture layouts to demonstrate the functionality and usability of rooms, where this is not readily apparent from floor areas, dimensions or standard layouts.

Drawings should be sufficiently detailed to show that rooms are of adequate size, shape and layout, with appropriate circulation space, door swings and window positions.

RC 7**Car and cycle parking**

Conversions often increase the demand for parking. Applications must clearly set out the proposed arrangements for car and cycle parking, in line with the standards in the North Tyneside Transport and Highways Supplementary Planning Document. Parking should not harm the setting of the building or the character of the surrounding area.

RC 8**Cycle storage**

Cycle storage should be located as close as possible to the main entrance for convenience. It should be covered, lockable and provide good protection from the weather. The store should be built from materials that match the wider development. Cycle storage and waste storage must be provided in separate enclosures.

RC 9**Waste and recycling**

Adequate provision should be made for waste and recycling storage, with facilities that are conveniently accessible to both residents and collection services. Waste and recycling storage should be sensitively located to minimise visual impact and avoid adverse effects on residential amenity. They should not be positioned directly beneath windows or located where they would result in noise disturbance to nearby residents. Waste stores should be designed as an integral part of the development and constructed using materials that are consistent with the wider scheme.

RC 10**Boundary treatments**

Boundary treatments must respect the local character and sense of place. They should use materials, proportions, and designs that fit with the surrounding buildings and streetscape.

RC 11**Shop conversions**

Historic shopfronts that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the building should be retained. Where shopfronts are not historic, new windows and doors should reflect the original street design and the arrangement of first-floor windows. Ground-floor openings should align with those above, following the shape and style of upper-floor windows. Materials and their detailing at ground level should also match or complement those on the upper floors.

Historic shopfront

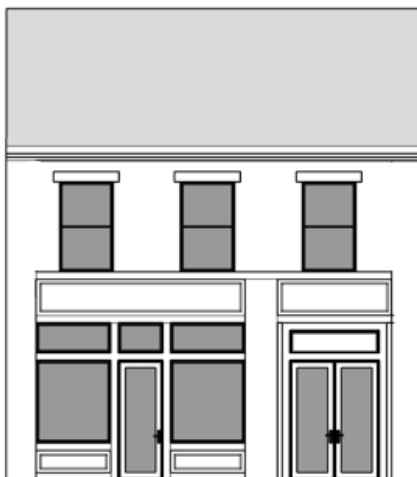


Traditional shopfront of historic interest that contributes positively to the building and streetscape.

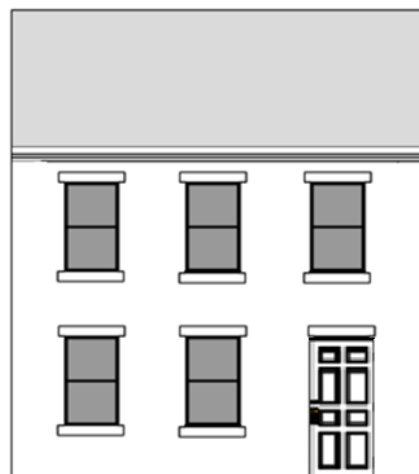


Sensitive conversion retains the historic shopfront, preserving character while achieving privacy through reversible measures such as internal shutters or obscure glazing.

Non-historic shopfront



Modern shopfront with no historic value.



New openings reflect upper floor proportions, restoring a coherent façade.

Additional Design Codes for Historic Buildings

Many older buildings that may be suitable for conversion to housing are also heritage assets. These may be designated, such as listed buildings or buildings within conservation areas, or non-designated, such as those on the Council's Local Register. Converting heritage assets for residential use can support positive change, help regenerate places, and promote civic pride.

Designs for conversions should enable new and sustainable uses while protecting the building's heritage significance. In some cases, historic buildings may not be suitable for residential conversion. Historic England's "Heritage Works for Housing" provides further guidance on how historic buildings can be repurposed and refurbished for housing.

RC 12 Internal layout

The building's original layout and features of special interest should guide the design of the proposed conversion. Significant rooms should not be subdivided, so their original character is preserved. Where new partitions are needed, they should be designed in a way that respects the building's structure and historic development.

RC 13 Historic fabric

Proposals should retain as much historic fabric as possible and use appropriate materials and repair methods. Repairs to significant elements of historic buildings should follow a like-for-like approach. For example,

where original windows survive, they should be repaired and used as a model for any necessary replacements.



The conversion of vacant buildings into apartments and houses in Northumberland Square, North Shields, has included repairs to the stone façade and the installation of new windows, where these were beyond repair, to match the originals.

RC 14 **Historic legibility**

The building's original purpose should remain clear in the conversion. Any new interventions or alterations should be visually distinct from the historic fabric, allowing the building's significance to be understood while supporting its new use.

RC 15 **Door and window openings**

On principal elevations, window and door openings should be limited to those that already exist. On secondary elevations, some additional openings may be acceptable. Any new opening should be proportionate and detailed in a way that reflects existing patterns on the building. In some cases, and subject to careful design, contemporary openings may be appropriate, but this will be considered on a case-by-case basis.



The conversion of Preston Towers in North Shields uses existing openings to inform the internal layout, maintaining the building's historic character and avoiding unnecessary alterations to the principal elevations.

RC 16

New additions

Where an extension is proposed, it should respect the scale, proportions, and rhythm of the existing building and its setting. Extensions should be located on parts of the building that are of lower significance and should take into account any structural interventions needed to support the new work.



The New Winning Tavern in Wallsend has been sensitively converted from a vacant public house into ten apartments. The scheme includes a rear extension designed to complement the character and form of the original building.

RC 17

Soundproofing

Soundproofing in historic buildings should not compromise their historic or architectural significance. Building Regulations Part E recognises this and allows for special dispensation so that sound insulation can be improved as far as is practically possible. In such cases, proposals should clearly demonstrate that all reasonable measures have been taken to reduce noise transmission.

Checklist

The Design Code is a key consideration when planning applications are assessed. The Design Code Compliance Checklist is a simple tool to help applicants explain how their proposals respond to these requirements. While completing the checklist is not mandatory, submitting it with your application can make the process clearer, quicker and more robust.

Why complete the checklist?

- It clearly shows how your proposal meets the Design Code.
- It reduces the likelihood of follow-up questions from the Council.
- It helps avoid delays in the determination of your application.
- It strengthens your case if an application is refused and appealed.

Submitting a completed checklist at the point of application is the simplest way to demonstrate compliance with the Design Code and support a timely decision.

Code number and title	Key points to address	Applicant Response
RC 1 – Quality of accommodation	Provide well-designed accommodation with adequate size, daylight, outlook and privacy	☐ Yes ☐ No
RC 2 – Subdivision	Avoid blocking windows; maintain external character	☐ Yes ☐ No
RC 3 – Roof space conversion	Provide sufficient headroom, daylight and outlook	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
RC 4 – Layout and noise mitigation	Minimise noise transfer between units	☐ Yes ☐ No

RC 5 – Services	Minimise external impact; route internally	☐ Yes ☐ No
RC 6 – Space standards	Have regard to NDSS	☐ Yes ☐ No
RC 7 – Car and cycle parking	Provide parking without harming character	☐ Yes ☐ No
RC 8 – Cycle storage	Secure, covered storage near entrance	☐ Yes ☐ No
RC 9 – Waste and recycling	Accessible, well-designed waste storage	☐ Yes ☐ No
RC 10 – Boundary treatments	Respect local character	☐ Yes ☐ No
RC 11 – Shop conversions	Retain or reflect shopfront design	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

Additional Design Codes for Historic Buildings

RC 12 – Internal layout	Retain significant rooms and features	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
RC 13 – Historic fabric	Retain and repair materials	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
RC 14 – Historic legibility	Maintain original form and function	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
RC 15 – Door and window openings	Respect proportions and detailing	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

RC 16 – New additions	Subordinate extensions and respect building	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
RC 17 – Soundproofing	Improve insulation without harming significance	☐ Yes ☐ No
Further information in support of your answers		

North Tyneside Design Code

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