Non-Habitable to Habitable Conversion

Converting a shed, garage, carport or other outbuilding into a habitable room

THE SHORT VERSION

Changing a Class 10a outbuilding into a habitable room is not simply a change of use. A Building Permit is required before conversion work starts, and the building must meet all the requirements that apply for a proposed Class 1a dwelling.

YOUR APPLICATION IN 5 SIMPLE STEPS

1	2	3	4	5
Check planning	**Check the building**	**Prepare the design**	**Apply for approval**	**Complete & certify**
Confirm the proposed use and parking arrangements.	Identify what must change to meet dwelling requirements.	Plans, engineering and supporting reports may be required.	Obtain the required planning and Building Permit approvals.	Provide all required certificates and compliance evidence.

Can I convert my shed, garage or carport?

Potentially, yes - but the existing building must be made suitable for the proposed habitable use. Many sheds, patios, garages, carports and alfresco areas were designed as non-habitable Class 10a structures and do not meet habitable-room requirements without substantial modification.

PLANNING	BUILDING	EVIDENCE
Use & parking	**Class 1a standard**	**Plans & certification**
The proposed use must be permitted and parking requirements still apply.	The conversion must satisfy the applicable NCC requirements.	Engineering, energy, BAL and service evidence may be required.

Three things people often get wrong

- A shed approved as a shed is not approved for sleeping, living or other habitable uses.
- A Building Permit is required before conversion work begins, even if the building already exists.
- Building a shed now with the intention of converting it later does not avoid the requirements. Designing for future conversion right from the start is usually easier than converting an existing non-habitable building.

BEFORE YOU START

If you are considering a future dwelling conversion, get professional advice before building the outbuilding. Designing it to a higher standard from the beginning can reduce the work required later.

What needs to change?

The main areas that commonly prevent an outbuilding being used as a habitable room

1 Floors, moisture & drainage

A slab or floor that was suitable for a shed may not be suitable for dwelling use. The existing floor needs to be assessed for structure, moisture protection, finished levels and drainage.

- Structural suitability for Class 1a use, including AS 2870 where applicable.
- Evidence of a suitable damp-proof membrane and/or other required moisture protection.
- Finished floor levels and surrounding ground levels must provide adequate weather and surface-water protection.
- Adequate surface-water drainage around the building.

2 Ceiling height, light & ventilation

Habitable rooms need adequate ceiling height, natural light and ventilation. Existing sheds and garages often need additional openings, ceilings or ventilation to achieve compliance.

- Minimum ceiling heights must comply with the applicable NCC provisions for the room and use.
- Habitable rooms need the required natural light and ventilation.
- Windows and openings may need modification or additional openings.

3 Structure, framing & setbacks

The existing structure must be suitable for its new use and the site. A shed frame designed for storage does not automatically demonstrate compliance as a dwelling.

- Timber or steel framing must satisfy the applicable Australian Standards and structural requirements.
- Tie-downs, bracing, footings and connections will require structural assessment and certification.
- Existing setbacks and fire-separation provisions must be checked against the proposed Class 1a use and the site.

4 Energy efficiency

ENERGY EFFICIENCY MATTERS

The conversion must address the applicable current NCC energy-efficiency requirements. The NCC provides several ways to demonstrate compliance, including an approved house energy rating method such as NatHERS, the Deemed-to-Satisfy Elemental Provisions, or a Performance Solution using an appropriate NCC Assessment Method, such as Verification using a Reference Building (VURB). A combination of compliance pathways may also be used, depending on the building and proposed work. The chosen pathway must demonstrate compliance with the relevant NCC Performance Requirements.

5 Services & safety

- Electrical, plumbing, gas and glazing must comply and require the appropriate certificates where applicable.
- Termite protection must comply with AS 3660.1 where required.
- Stairs, landings, balustrades and other access elements must comply where applicable.
- Hardwired smoke alarms must be installed in the required locations and interconnected where required.

6 Bushfire

If the property is in a Bushfire Prone Area, additional requirements may apply. Depending on the building, location and separation from other buildings, a BAL assessment and compliant construction may be required.

DON'T ASSUME THE EXISTING SHED IS COMPLIANT

An existing Building Permit for the outbuilding does not mean it automatically complies with the requirements for its new/proposed habitable use. The proposed conversion must be assessed for the new use.

Your application checklist

Tick these off before submitting a Building Permit application

Application & approvals

- ☐ Completed BA1 (Certified) or BA2 (Uncertified) Building Permit application.
- ☐ All required owner signatures and accurate estimated value of building work, including GST.
- ☐ Registered builder details where required for the proposed Class 1a building work, or owner-builder approval where applicable.
- ☐ Planning Approval, or written confirmation from Planning that approval is not required.
- ☐ Applicable Building Permit fees and State Government levies.

Reports & certificates

- ☐ Structural engineering/certification for existing and proposed work.
- ☐ Geotechnical report or engineer-certified site classification, where required.
- ☐ Wind rating information to AS 4055 or AS/NZS 1170, where applicable.
- ☐ Energy-efficiency assessment/NatHERS certificate and report, where required.
- ☐ BAL report, certificate and construction requirements where applicable.
- ☐ Certificates of compliance for electrical, plumbing, gas and glazing, where applicable.

Plans & construction details

- ☐ Site plan showing boundaries, existing buildings, proposed work, setbacks, levels and services.
- ☐ All elevations, including existing and proposed ground levels and finished floor levels.
- ☐ Cross-sections showing floor, wall and roof construction and relevant levels.
- ☐ Construction details showing materials, spans, sizes, fixings, insulation, cladding, finishes and other information needed to construct the work.
- ☐ Details of proposed earthworks, retaining walls, drainage or other site works.

Habitable-room requirements

- ☐ Required sanitary, kitchen and laundry facilities for the proposed use, where applicable.
- ☐ Compliant ceiling heights, natural light and ventilation.
- ☐ Compliant floor/slab moisture protection, waterproofing and finished levels.
- ☐ Compliant framing, structural connections, footings and fire separation.
- ☐ Compliant stairs, landings, balustrades and access where applicable.
- ☐ Smoke alarms, termite protection and bushfire requirements where applicable.

IMPORTANT

This is a conversion, not simply a change of labels on the plans. The Shire may request additional information, testing, engineering or certification where the existing building design does not clearly demonstrate compliance.

Before you convert

The questions to ask before spending money on the conversion

Ask the question

ABOUT THE EXISTING BUILDING

- What was the building originally approved and built as?
- Do the existing plans, permits and certificates still exist?
- Was the slab, frame and roof designed for dwelling use?
- Are there known alterations or unauthorised works?

ABOUT THE PROPOSED USE

- Will it be a bedroom, living room, kitchen or another habitable space?
- Will converting it affect existing parking requirements?
- Are planning or development approvals required?
- Will the conversion affect bushfire, setback or fire-separation requirements?

Can I build a shed and convert it later?

You can plan for a future conversion but obtain professional advice before construction. Designing the building from the beginning with the potential future Class 1a requirements in mind can make the later approval process much easier.

A CHEAPER SHED NOW CAN BECOME AN EXPENSIVE DWELLING LATER

If the building is designed only for storage, later conversion may involve new windows, insulation, ceilings, linings, waterproofing, structural work, services, fire separation, energy upgrades and other modifications.

Can I live in my shed while I build my home?

Temporary occupation of an outbuilding may be possible, but it is a separate approval process and not always guaranteed. You must obtain the required building, planning and health approvals for the outbuilding and proposed dwelling, and the outbuilding must meet all conditions imposed for temporary occupation.

- Adequate sanitary facilities, kitchen/food preparation and laundry facilities.
- Safe and compliant potable water, electricity and waste management/disposal.
- Appropriate floor, moisture, ceiling-height, light and ventilation standards.
- Compliant electrical, plumbing, gas and glazing installations.
- Smoke alarms and all other required life-safety measures.

APPROVAL COMES BEFORE WORK

Do not start conversion work because you intend to apply for approval later. The Building Permit must be approved before building work commences.

Need more help?

For Building and Planning Approval and/or application questions, please contact the Shire's Development Services Team.

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GUIDE ONLY This information sheet is intended as a plain-English guide only. Requirements depend on the site, proposed work and current legislation. Additional information may be requested during assessment. The applicant/builder remains responsible for obtaining all required approvals, permits, licenses and certificates.