

Thinking of replacing a carpet with a hard floor finish?

Please read this first!

Hard floor surfaces such as timber laminates, sanded floorboards and ceramic tiles have become increasingly popular in recent years. This trend has however, led to an increasing number of complaints with regard to noise and disturbance to neighbours, specifically from apartments and flats. The London Borough of Harrow has prepared this leaflet with guidance from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to provide advice and to highlight the potential noise issues associated with replacing a soft floor covering with a hard floor finish.

Apartments and Flats

Noise and hard floor surfaces

Research has shown that when a carpet is removed and replaced with wood or laminate flooring, the noise your neighbour in the property below experiences, will increase significantly and could change the noise environment in their home from relatively quiet to unbearable. This is likely to have an adverse effect on their enjoyment of their property and in some cases, can lead to their health and well-being and can also lead to disputes between neighbours.



It may also result in legal action being taken against you.

Minimising noise transmission

To avoid disturbing neighbours when fitting laminate floors a good quality resilient underlay should be used. In addition, extensive use of rugs in areas of high foot traffic will also help. Also wearing soft-soled shoes, such as slippers, will reduce the amount of noise generated.

The advantages are:

- they reduce noise transmission to your neighbours
- they prolong the life of your laminate or wood floor
- they reduce noise and vibration in your own home
- they allow the floor to be more resilient and reduce injuries to children and the elderly when they fall
- they may avoid the potential for confrontation with your neighbour

Houses

Noise nuisance from wooden or laminate flooring can also occur in attached and detached houses. Noise transmission can occur horizontally if wooden or laminate floor finishes are able to touch the shared party wall between the houses.



Renting a house or apartment

If you rent your dwelling from a Local Authority, Housing Association, Registered Social Landlord or Private Owner, you should check your lease or rental agreement and contact the appropriate person to check if laminate or wood finish floors are permitted to be installed before carrying out any work.

If flooring is installed without the appropriate permission, you may be asked to remove it and re-install carpets at your expense.

The 7 STEP Best Practice – for installing laminates and wood floors

STEP 1 – Lay underlay so that it lies flat and not uneven

STEP 2 – Ensure the underlay edges are abutted and do not overlap, as this will create an uneven surface for your laminate/wood floor

STEP 3 – Lay the underlay so that it has at least 10cm extra, turned up at each perimeter wall (see picture)

IF EXISTING SKIRTING NOT BEING REMOVED

STEP 4 – Lay the laminate/wood floor so that it stops at least 2cm from the wall or existing skirting.

STEP 5 – Pull the underlay around the edge of the laminate (see picture below)

STEP 6 – Fix a small wood channel to the base of the skirting or wall, so that the underlay passes between the floor and channel

STEP 7 – Trim off the protruding underlay (see picture)

Or alternatively

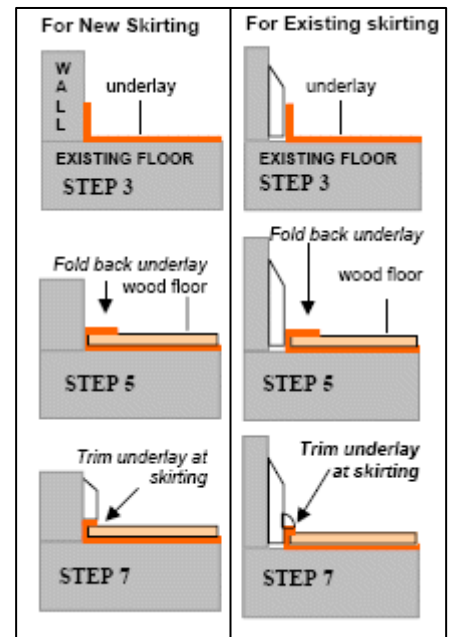
IF USING NEW SKIRTINGS or REMOVING AND REUSING OLD SKIRTINGS

STEP 4 – Lay the laminate/wood floor so that it stops at least 2cm from the wall

STEP 5 – Pull the underlay around the edge of the laminate (see picture)

STEP 6 – Fix the skirting to the wall, so that the underlay passes between the floor and skirting base

STEP 7 – Trim off the protruding underlay (see picture)



What to do in the event of problems

By far the best way to resolve problems with noise from neighbours is through talking to your neighbours and explaining your concerns. It is more than likely that they are unaware of the problem and will be happy to discuss a solution.

Suggest that if an underlay has not been installed that the floor be lifted and one installed. An agreement to share the cost of this may help to persuade them. Alternatively, laying rugs on the areas of the floor where problems are most experienced may be less costly and would be more effective at reducing the noise level. If you are having difficulty talking to your neighbour directly, your Local Authority will be able to put you in touch with a free mediation service who are expert in dealing with disputes.

if mediation has not been successful and you feel that the noise being experienced is over and above that which would normally be experienced in please contact the Environmental protection team of Harrow Council (see contact details below).

If the problem is not satisfactorily resolved and the noise disturbance is considered to be a statutory nuisance, action may be required to reinstate a soft floor finish.

For information

A guide entitled "Noise control from laminated and wooden flooring" is available to download from the Defra web site www.defra.gov.uk

This fact sheet can be made available in Braille, large print, Makaton and on audio tape. It can also be translated or interpreted into languages other than English on request. Signers can be arranged for customers with hearing difficulties. An induction loop system is available in our 3rd floor reception. A portable induction loop system is available on request.

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