

Dwelling houses- Building heights, storeys and basements

This information sheet explains the requirements for new dwelling houses, when approved as complying development. It provides information on the maximum permitted building heights, basement areas and the number of storeys for complying development.

Important note

This information sheet is for guidance only and may not contain all the information relevant to every property in NSW. Applicants should refer to the [relevant planning controls](#)¹ before beginning work, or seek professional advice on how the planning controls apply to their property.

The majority of the development that can be done as exempt or complying development in NSW is identified in the State wide exempt and complying development policy (the policy). View the policy at the [Exempt and Complying Development Policy website](#)².

Exempt development is minor building work that does not need planning or building approval. [Information sheet 1.1](#)³ provides more information about exempt development.

Complying development is a joint planning and construction approval that can be granted by council or a private certifier. [Information sheet 1.2](#)⁴ provides more information about complying development.

Note: As identified in Information Sheets 1.1 and 1.2 exempt and complying development cannot be carried out on certain land.

The policy includes a number of exclusions and specific requirements for the construction of dwelling houses as complying development. It is important to know whether any such exclusions or requirements apply to your land which may restrict the carrying out of complying development. You should refer to information sheet 1.4 for detail on exclusions and requirements that apply to different types of land.

Development standards for dwelling houses as complying development

Under the policy, single and two storey dwelling houses can be built as complying development, as long as they comply with the development standards. Dwelling houses are private residences and referred to here as houses.

Before planning begins, you need to determine whether the proposed house meets the following development standards:

- a maximum of 2 storeys at any point (including basements and garages), and
- a maximum 8.5 metre height above ground level (existing).

What is the maximum permitted height of development?

The maximum height allowed for a house is 8.5m above the existing ground level: this enables two storey developments on moderately sloping sites to be constructed.

The maximum height allowed for an outbuilding is 4.8m above the existing ground level.

Complying development

¹ <https://maps.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/Terms>

² www.planning.nsw.gov.au/exemptandcomplying

³ www.planning.nsw.gov.au/exemptandcomplyingoverview

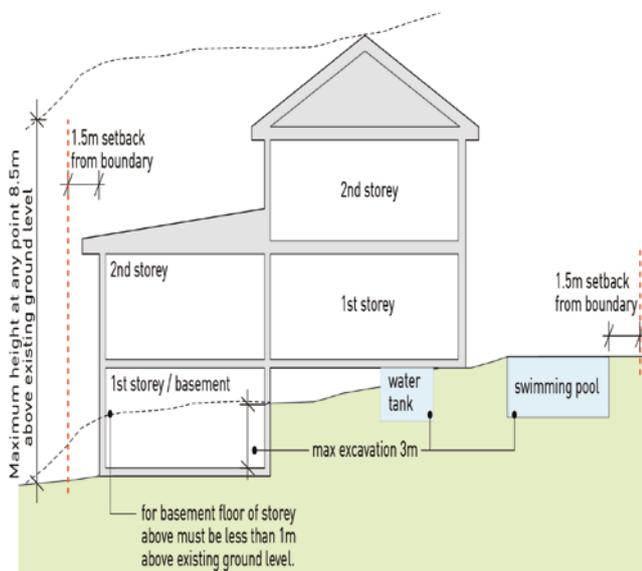
⁴ www.planning.nsw.gov.au/exemptandcomplyingoverview

How to calculate building height of a dwelling house

This height of a dwelling house is measured from the existing ground level, which is the ground level of a site at any point, before any earthworks (excavation or fill) have taken place.

As the existing ground level can change across a site, the maximum height limit will also vary with this change in ground level. Refer to figure 1.

Figure 1: Calculating the number of storeys in a dwelling house



Where a development proposal requires earthworks (such as a swimming pool or water tank), these changes to the ground level do not result in changes to the existing ground level. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

How to calculate the number of storeys

A storey is the space between a floor level and the ceiling or roof above.

The policy allows for the construction of single and two storey houses – a basement is included in the calculation of storeys. Figure 1 indicates how to measure storeys in dwelling houses for complying development.

You may be aware that other documents such as the *Building Code of Australia* calculate the number of storeys in a building differently to the policy. However, under the policy the number of storeys in a building is determined by taking a

vertical line and placing it through any point of the house.

On a sloping site, a house may have a building form that is “stepped”, with separate storeys stepping up with the slope of the land. This is acceptable provided that the line does not pass through three overlapping storeys.

Basements

Basements may be used for storage, a habitable area or as a garage. A basement:

- has a floor level that is predominantly below existing ground level, and
- requires the floor level of the storey above, to be less than 1m above the existing ground level.

A basement is classified as a storey and this means the restrictions that apply to the amount of storeys for a house apply to a basement.

The floor area of basements is included in the total floor area for all habitable areas ([see information sheet 3.3⁵](#)) and the area of the basement is restricted to:

- 25m² for lots not more than 10m wide, or
- 45m² for lots more than 10m wide.

What else do I need to consider?

- Works must comply with the Building Code of Australia and be installed in accordance with the manufacturer’s specifications.
- If you propose to remove or prune any existing trees or vegetation, you should contact your council first to make sure you don’t need approval for this.

If your proposal doesn’t meet the required standards for complying development, you may still be able to do the work, but you must get development approval first. In this case, you should contact your local council to discuss your options.

⁵ www.planning.nsw.gov.au/en-us/buildinginns/exemptandcomplyingdevelopment.aspx

Further Information

For more information visit the [Exempt and Complying Development Policy website](#)⁶ or contact the Department's Exempt and Complying Development Team on 1300 305 695 or by [email](#)⁷.

Electronic Housing Code

The Electronic Housing Code website helps applicants determine whether the proposed development qualifies as exempt or complying development and the standards that must be met.

Applications for complying development can also be lodged and tracked online for those council areas which are using the Electronic Housing Code. Visit the [Electronic Housing Code website](#)⁸ to find out if it is used by your local council or for more details.

⁶ www.planning.nsw.gov.au/exemptandcomplying

⁷ codes@planning.nsw.gov.au

⁸ www.electronichousingcode.com.au/