

LABSS INFORMATION PAPER INFOP46

Guidance Clause 4.3.14: Handrails to Stairs

Applicable to Domestic Buildings

Information for Verifiers

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Document Version Control.

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Purpose

This information paper has been produced to provide clarity on the provision of a continuous handrail to a private stair flight where a newel post interrupts the handrail at a change of direction on a winder stair, as illustrated on **Figure 1**.

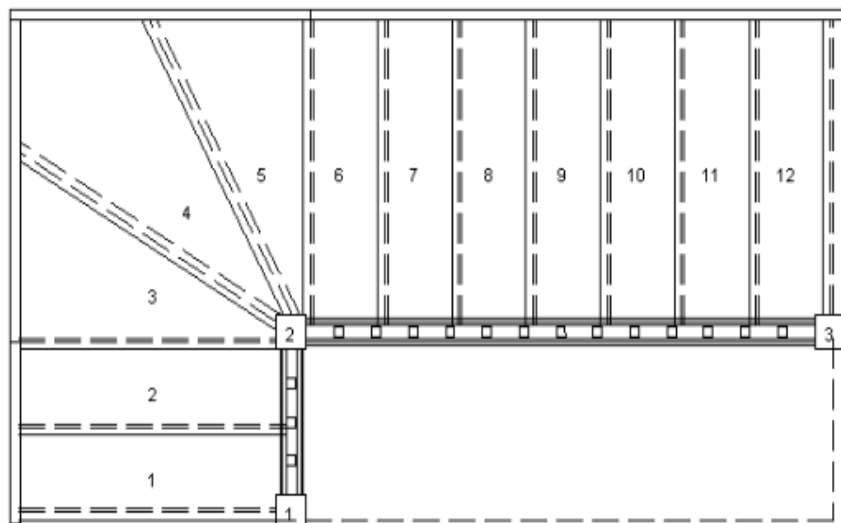


Figure 1: Winder staircase with handrail interrupted by newel post

This paper is provided for information only and should be read in conjunction with Mandatory Standard 4.3 – *Stairs and ramps* of the *Domestic Technical Handbook* (DTH).

Conclusion

A newel post on a winder stair may, in principle, form part of a continuous handrail. However, this is dependent on its design and ability to provide a level of support comparable to that of a conventional handrail.

Background Information

The Scottish Building Standards Hub (SBSH) has received several related enquiries on this matter, which has also arisen during the assessment of Scottish Type Approval Scheme (STAS) applications.

For the purposes of this paper, the discussion relates to a private stair with an effective width of 900mm. On this basis, a continuous handrail is required to one side only, with the opposite

side suitably designed to permit the future installation of a second handrail, should this be required. However, it should be demonstrated that a minimum clear effective width of 800mm is maintained between handrails should the installation of the additional handrail be required, as shown on **Figure 2** below.

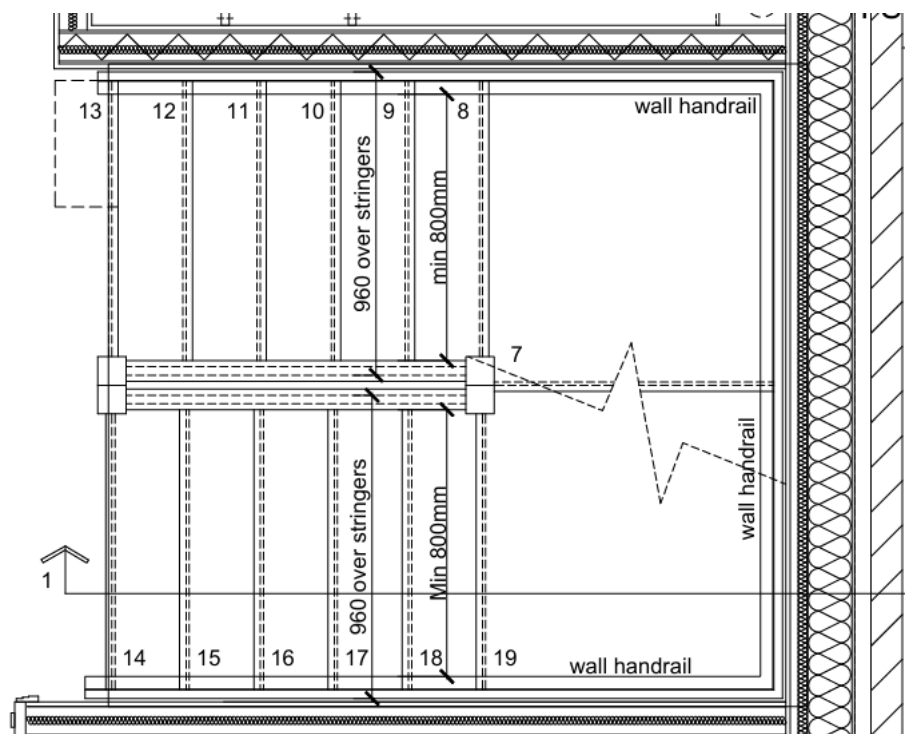


Figure 2: Continuous handrail to opposite side with 800mm clear width maintained between handrails

A handrail should extend the full length of a stair flight. As defined in the Technical Handbooks, a ‘flight’ means *part of a stair or ramp uninterrupted by a landing*.

Where a newel post interrupts the handrail at a winder, there is potential concern that the newel post may not provide adequate support to assist safe passage, as reproduced on **Figure 3**. In particular, a newel post without a cap may not typically allow a full hand-wrap grip and may therefore present difficulties for some users, including those with reduced strength or mobility.

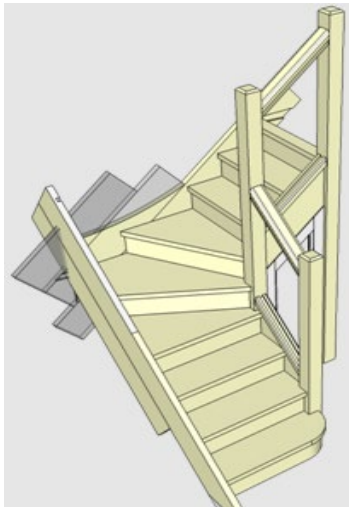


Figure 3: Typical example of a square newel post on a winder stair

While a newel post is often used to indicate the beginning or end of a stair flight, it may also signal a change in direction. Where such a change occurs within a continuous flight - such as with tapered treads forming a winder stair - the newel post effectively forms part of the continuous means of support for those treads.

In these circumstances, the height, profile and ability to provide a secure grip become critical considerations. This aligns with point (b) of the guidance to clause 4.3.14 of the DTH, which states that a handrail should *'have a profile and projection that allows a firm grip.'*

Alternative to the Provision of an Additional Handrail

As an alternative to providing an additional continuous handrail fixed to the opposite side of the stair flight - where the effective width is reduced to 800mm. Reliance may instead be placed on the newel post and cap. Where this approach is proposed, careful consideration should be given to their design to ensure that:

- a) the newel post and cap offer similar functionality comparable to that of a handrail (*guidance on handrail design, dimensions and spacings is provided in Sections 5.10.2 and 3 of BS 8300: 2009; although this standard has been withdrawn, it's still referenced in the DTH*);
- b) the height of the newel post and cap is appropriate in relation to the handrail height, in accordance with clause 4.3.15;
- c) the newel cap has a profile and projection that allow a firm grip, most typical designs such as a ball, other turned profile or cap would generally allow a firm grip;
- d) the newel post and cap are within a reasonably comfortable reach range for the user from the relevant steps across the stair flight, for example as per the guidance on reach range as provided in Annex E of BS 8300-2: 2018.

To demonstrate compliance, robust supporting evidence should be submitted with any Building Warrant application proposing such an approach. Such evidence should confirm that the newel post and cap provide a firm grip, avoid finger or hand entrapment and meet all other relevant requirements.

Summary

A newel post on a winder stair may, in principle, form part of a continuous handrail. However, this is dependent on its design and ability to provide a level of support comparable to that of a conventional handrail, and the above considerations should be fully addressed in this respect.

End.