

The definitive guide to rooflights

Paul Trace from Lumen Rooflight offers some practical guidance to help you choose the right product for your project.

Choosing the right rooflight for your property

The rooflight, or skylight as it is often referred to as, is an ingenious concept that introduces natural light into a building discretely but effectively. They provide an even distribution of light to large low-level structures and can illuminate the dark areas in a room that windows could never reach. However with so many options available, choosing the most suitable rooflight for your home can be anything but straightforward.

The first thing to consider is the type of materials that are available. Steel is the obvious choice for period properties and barn conversions, but they are now also being more frequently used in sleek new contemporary houses. Timber is a long-time favourite on homes of any style, but getting onto the roof to maintain the timber can be an awkward task. PVCu is also an option, but it will not provide the slim frames that metal is capable of, nor the natural look of wood.

The important thing is to select a rooflight that matches the look and feel that you are trying to achieve with your new build or renovation, as it should blend in with your roof and the materials used throughout the build. There are many different types of rooflight on the market catering for the modern contemporary style through to a more traditional look and feel.

Conservation style rooflights

If you have a listed property or live within a conservation area, you may be restricted in the type of rooflight you install and the chances are that you will need a traditional or conservation style rooflight that complies with strict building regulations. If your property is Listed you will need to work closely with your local authority before making changes to the building fabric. An excellent resource to find out more on this topic is the Listed Property Owners Club, www.lpoc.co.uk.

Traditional or conservation style rooflights date back to the 18th century, where in their most primitive form, they were used to bring light into agricultural buildings. Modern conservation style rooflights should be as close to the original design as

possible, and should compliment the property in which they are installed, with a minimal amount of framework visible.

Whilst there are many so called 'conservation rooflights' available, there only a handful that can comfortably pass this requirement. You should consider aspects such as the internal aesthetics, the functionality of the skylight and its components.

As with all rooflight installations you will need to discuss the application of the rooflight with your local councils building control department, with particular reference to the Part L regulations.

Rooflights and environmental performance

Independent research proves conclusively that rooflights can save energy in many applications, and the greater the rooflight area the greater the potential savings. The amount of energy needed to light a building artificially is often much greater than the amount of energy used to heat it, and is often the greatest single energy use in operating the building.

Rooflights can have a major impact on the overall energy consumption of a building, cutting energy costs by reducing need for use of the electric lights. However, there are some products that perform well above the minimum recommended environmental standards that could bring about even greater benefits in terms of thermal performance. So deciding on the right materials, of which the choice is plentiful, will be key.

Whatever your choice of material it is important that you check the energy rating performance and U Values of the glazing. It is worth asking exactly how each product performed under test conditions as there are many variables within the test that will differentiate between an average performing rooflight and an excellent one.

Glazing options

Once you have chosen the most appropriate material for your rooflight, you then need to consider the glazing options. Aside from thermal performance you need to decide if you need toughened glass, for additional safety and protection against falling objects. Toughened glass does not mean that it is suitable to walk on, so if you need to stand on a rooflight it will require specialist glazing.

Self cleaning glass is another option. This technological breakthrough was introduced to the UK in 2002 by Pilkington, and is still considered by many to be an impossible dream! Self cleaning glass is effectively the same as conventional glass, but with a specially developed coating on the outside, that once exposed to daylight, reacts in two ways. Firstly, it breaks down any organic dirt deposits through a photocatalytic process, and secondly, when it rains, instead of forming droplets, the water spreads evenly over the surface and takes the dirt off with it. It is kinder to the environment than ordinary glass and it is the ideal choice for situations where cleaning will be costly or difficult.

Maintaining your rooflight

As with almost all exterior building materials, you should undertake regular maintenance to ensure that the product continues to work efficiently.

Prior to the installation, check thoroughly for chips and scratches to any powder coating. If there are shallow or superficial scratches or chips then these can be treated with a touch up paint. If there are deep scratches or extensive parts of the powder coating are damaged then consult your building contractor or architect as the rooflight may need to be replaced.

Maintenance at regular intervals is essential to uphold the longevity of your rooflight and to ensure that the guarantee is valid. This consists for the most part of cleaning the accessible parts of the product. Cleaning should be carried out regularly and at no more than six monthly intervals.

In areas exposed to extreme weather or along costal areas, this time should be reduced to every four months. As the external surfaces of the rooflight are subject to the bulk of weathering and are largely inaccessible from the inside, cleaning should be carried out from outside if possible.

If this is not possible the rooflight casement should be wound open to its furthest extent and then cleaned from the inside. Wash the accessible metal parts of the rooflight with warm soapy water, a soft cloth and rinse any cleaned sections with clean warm water. Do not use any abrasive cleaners or hard bristle brushes.

Don't cut costs

As with most things in life you get what you pay for, and this is particularly true when comparing the rooflight market. Prices often reflect the quality of manufacturing and materials used to produce roof windows. The rooflight may be one of the last things that you budget for, but it is also one of the most important finishing touches to your home. Opting for the cheapest product may come back to haunt you in the long run.

For further information on the Lumen rooflight and its benefits contact Lumen on 0845 050 8746, email info@lumenrooflight.co.uk or visit www.lumenrooflight.co.uk

About Lumen

The Lumen range of rooflights includes designs for conservation and contemporary projects for both pitched and flat roof applications. Lumen rooflights are manufactured to an industry leading standard and incorporate a wide range of Pilkington glazing, including self clean Activ. Manufactured in the UK to ISO9001:2008 and available in a range of standard or bespoke sizes.