



Renovating an HDB Household Shelter: A Permitted-Works Check Before Drilling

Description

An HDB household shelter is not an ordinary storeroom with a heavy door. Its walls, floor, ceiling and door form a protected system. The practical renovation question is therefore surface-specific: what may be added, how thick or removable it must be, and whether the proposed fixing requires drilling, hacking or alteration of a protected element.

This guide is for a flat owner or renovator planning finishes, storage or fittings inside a household shelter. The decision is to separate permitted finishes and removable fittings from drilling, hacking and structural changes that can damage the shelter.

Why the shelter is different

BCA explains that the household shelter is designed for protection during a war emergency and has strengthened walls, floor, ceiling and a specially designed door. Works likely to weaken or damage a structural element are not permitted. That purpose is the reason cosmetic preferences do not override the no-hacking and no-drilling boundaries. [BCA household and storey shelter guidance](#).

Floor and skirting limits

The BCA permitted-works list allows floor tiles bonded with wet cement mortar, but the total floor finish and screed thickness must not exceed 50 mm. Floor skirting tiles may be bonded to the shelter walls up to 100 mm high. Those numbers belong on the contractor drawing and completion check, not only in a chat message. [BCA permitted-works schedule](#).

Walls and ceilings need their own branch

A finish that is acceptable on an external face may not be acceptable on the internal protected wall. False ceilings, permanent built-ins and concealed services can obstruct inspection or introduce prohibited fixings. Ask the contractor to mark the exact surface, fixing method, penetration depth and

removability for every item.

The door and ventilation openings are functional

Do not paint over identification, obstruct ventilation openings, replace the shelter door hardware with ordinary fittings or build cabinetry that prevents full operation. Test the door swing and seals after nearby work. A visually neat installation is a failure if the shelter cannot be closed, inspected or cleared quickly.

Use a written stop-work rule

Give the site supervisor a simple instruction: stop before any unshown drilling, hacking, chasing, welding or permanent anchor in the shelter envelope. A last-minute installer may not know the room is protected. Photographs taken before finishes and after completion help show what was actually done.

The two working tools

The first original tool is a five-row room-surface matrix covering floor, skirting, walls, ceiling, door and services. The second is a stop-work card placed in the renovation file and given to every trade. It names the prohibited actions and requires the owner or qualified adviser to clear any deviation before tools touch the shelter.

Surface or item	Likely acceptable starting point	Escalate before work
Floor	Permitted finish within the stated total thickness	Raised platform, excessive screed or unknown build-up
Wall	Permitted coating or removable arrangement within BCA rules	Hacking, chasing, drilling or permanent concealed fixing
Ceiling	Keep protected surface and services accessible	False ceiling or penetrations
Door and vents	Maintain original operation and clearance	Replacement, obstruction, altered hardware or sealed opening

Keep the decision usable after today

A first check can go stale before the task is finished. Put why the shelter is different, floor and skirting limits and walls and ceilings need their own branch on separate dated lines instead of combining them into one `done` box. Attach the authority page or document beside the line it supports, record the person who checked it, and write the exact event that will force another check. That event may be a changed account, amended filing, new appointment, revised timetable, altered access route, later test run or updated dataset. The format matters because a future reader must be able to see which fact changed without repeating every part of the exercise.

Next, give the two original tools different owners. The person maintaining a room-surface matrix for floor, wall, ceiling, door and services work should preserve the inputs and arithmetic or branch logic. The person maintaining a contractor stop-work checklist keyed to drilling, hacking, thickness and fixture permanence should confirm that the final action followed the chosen route. One person may perform both roles, but the evidence should still distinguish calculation from execution. This prevents a correct plan from being mistaken for proof that the payment, filing, trip, report, repair, training or release actually happened.

Before relying on the result, ask a second reader to reproduce the conclusion from the saved material without being told the preferred answer. They should be able to match the right person, entity, account, property, route, service or software version; identify the controlling date; and explain the strongest stop condition. If they reach another branch, do not average the two answers. Reopen the disputed source, definition or input. A decision that cannot be reproduced is not ready for a consequential step.

Worked example

A carpenter proposes a full-height storage system. Instead of approving a drawing labelled 'shelter cabinet', the owner asks how it stands, whether it is removable, where every fixing goes, and whether the door and vent remain clear. A wall anchor into the protected shelter wall triggers a stop even if the cabinet itself looks ordinary.

The example is a calculation or decision illustration, not a report of an interview, purchase, visit, transaction, taste test or personal outcome. Replace its inputs with the reader's own current evidence.

Where this can go wrong

- Assuming an HDB renovation permit makes every household-shelter detail acceptable.
- Relying on a contractor's previous job without matching the current fixing and surface.
- Measuring the tile alone while ignoring adhesive and screed in the 50 mm total.
- Hiding vents, door clearances or protected surfaces behind permanent carpentry.

Before acting

1. Mark every shelter surface on the drawing.
2. Write the floor and skirting limits beside the specification.
3. List the fixing method and removability of every fitting.
4. Photograph the empty room, protected door and openings before work.
5. Stop and seek current BCA or professional advice when a detail is not listed.

Limits and useful next reading

The BCA schedule, the flat's approved layout and current HDB renovation controls govern the real job. This guide is not permission for an unlisted design. Where the work may affect structure, fire safety, services or shelter performance, obtain project-specific advice before construction.

For the next related decision, [check the wider HDB renovation permit](#). It is also useful to [plan the neighbour notice and drilling limits](#).

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