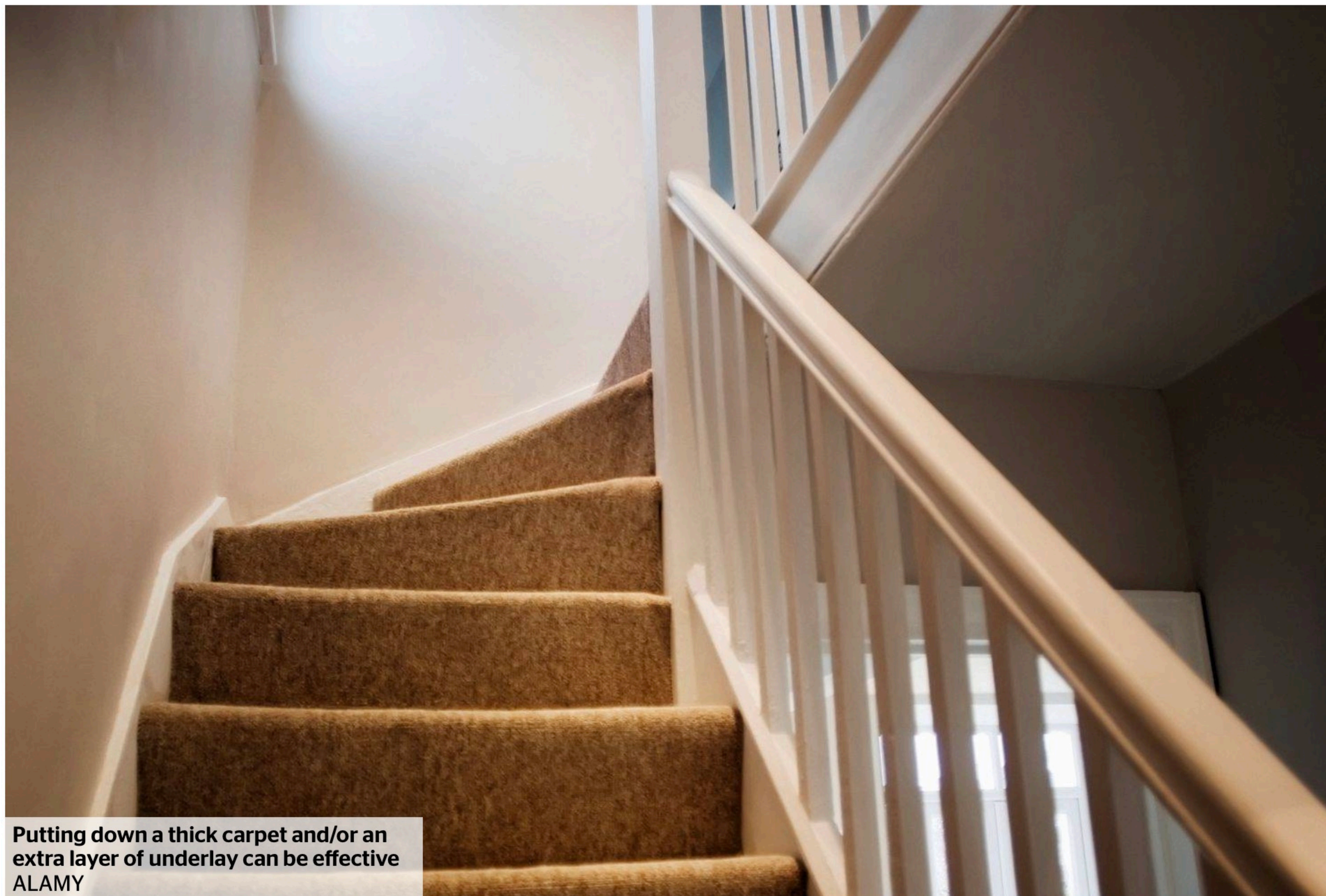


How to ... boost your soundproofing



Putting down a thick carpet and/or an extra layer of underlay can be effective
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There are ways to improve your home's noise levels — without calling the builders in, writes Cherry Maslen

Nobody wants their lockdown spoiled by noisy neighbours. With so many of us at home 24/7, there may be more sound coming through party walls than usual, thanks to conference calls, DIY jobs, online house parties and home schooling.

Low-level background noise is easier to get used to if it's fairly constant, such as the distant hum from a road, but intermittent rackets from neighbours can be a lot more nerve-jangling.

“There are basically two types of noise: ‘airborne’, such as music, TV or voices; and ‘impact’, including footsteps overhead or vibrations from traffic or household appliances,” says Mark Considine, from the soundproofing specialists Soundstop. “Understanding how

the noise reaches you helps in deciding how to deal with it.”

Of course, you can always invest in a set of noise-reducing headphones, but there are plenty of ways to improve your home's soundproofing — without calling the builders in.

Party walls

If you don't want to hear neighbours through a party wall, then careful positioning of heavy furniture such as dressers or a wardrobe helps to deaden sounds. You can add an extra





You may need to line garage walls with insulation or soundproofing boards
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layer of plasterboard to your walls too, but make sure it has the best possible soundproofing ability. Standard plasterboard is 12.5mm thick. However, for good soundproofing

thickness of 35mm, which could include a layer of insulation bonded to the back. You can screw boards on to the wall and then decorate.

Plasterboard costs about £40 for a 1.2m x 2.4m panel and you can still get it delivered from shops including B&Q, Wickes

and Homebase — although there are some restrictions on large deliveries — or order it online via a click and collect service from B&Q or Wickes.

Help from above

If the noise that's bothering you comes from the top floor in your own home, which can be exacerbated by creaky floorboards in old houses, then putting down a thick carpet upstairs and/or an extra layer of underlay is the most effective quick hit.

However, if you're fed up with thuds and crashes from

neighbours above you then this "impact" noise can be substantially reduced by adding a false ceiling. Considine says that Soundstop's most effective solution is the GenieClip system, which hangs a second ceiling using metal clips attached to existing joists. This can reduce ceiling height by 125mm, so could work well in a high-walled period conversion, although less so in a room with more modest dimensions. "It's unrealistic to expect to eliminate noise altogether," says Considine. "We aim for a 75 per cent to 80 per cent reduction."



GenieClip costs about £500 per ceiling and soundproofing specialists such as Soundstop and Soundproofing Store are continuing to deliver during lockdown. Normally a soundproofing firm will install the system for an approximate cost of £300 for two days' work. A keen DIY-er could get the job done, but it's best to get advice from a soundproofing company to understand your options first. A lower cost alternative would be acoustic plasterboard, as used in walls (see above), which is available to buy from stores including Wickes and B&Q.

If you're worried about what noise you might be making for your neighbours below you, search online for rubber matting and tiles that can be placed underneath carpets, from sites such as rubber.co.uk. Rubber sheeting is good at muffling impact sound, and can also help on walls, although you would need to add plasterboard on top.

Garden rooms and basements

Those with budding musicians practising at home during lockdown may need to take steps to mitigate the noise. Generally the higher up the house you go, the more sound travels, so try to confine music practice to basements or lower ground floors if possible. Garage conversions can work if the garage is farther away from neighbours, likewise garden rooms, although you may need to line garage walls with insulation or soundproofing boards. The best soundproofing

with garden rooms or sheds is to create a "room within a room", using timber and insulation panels inside your existing structure.

Glazing over

"Energy efficiency measures such as insulation and better windows often help with soundproofing, so you get two benefits for the price of one," says Atkinson. "If you're having new windows look at the decibel performance of the glass to get the best soundproofing. Always get your advice from glaziers and window companies rather than builders' merchants." Swapping single-glazed windows for double-glazed will reduce noise by 20 per cent, more if you choose frames and glass with optimum soundproofing. Secondary glazing, which means adding another piece of glazing on the inside, is a lower-cost alternative.

If changing your windows is not an option at the moment, then draught-sealing around old sash windows will stop them rattling when a lorry goes past, as well as preventing heat loss.

Finally, you can buy window "plugs" online, which are mats of soundproofing material cut the same size as your glazing — or you can make your own. They're opaque, so only useful after dark. You can lift them on and off, but make sure they fit as snugly as possible.

Go reconfigure

Could the noise problem be resolved by how you use your

space? Extensions and refurbishments may not be possible in lockdown, but this is a good time to consider making changes in the future. If it's a lot quieter at the back of the house than the front then perhaps you could move the room you spend the most time in to the garden end. Likewise, you could have your bedroom at the back of the house if you're a light sleeper, or your home office at the front if you don't mind some background noise while you're working.

If the whole family is at home right now, try to separate yourselves on to different floors if possible, rather than have everyone in rooms next to one another, as sounds transmit through interior walls more easily than through floors and ceilings. The noisier family members should be downstairs, with the quietest in the loft if possible. Encourage teens having lengthy online chats to use their headphones.

Fence me in

If you want to reduce road noise, then a close-boarded garden fence or wall will muffle sound better than a hedge, but it would need to be above vehicle height to be effective. "Fences and walls should be as close to the noise source as possible to deaden it," says Atkinson. Creating a noise distraction in a garden with a calming water feature can also make a pleasantly surprising difference. ■

