

Technical Advice Note: Space Standards for Residential Development

1. Introduction

1.1 This Technical Advice Note sets out West Suffolk Council’s interpretation of the Nationally Described Space Standards published in March 2015, and which came into full effect in October 2015. It should be read in conjunction with Building Regulations requirement M4 (2) ‘accessible and adaptable dwellings’.

1.2 This Technical Advice Note will help West Suffolk Council to apply appropriate space standards when considering applications for residential (Use Class C3) development in West Suffolk. This will result in residential developments that: are well designed and fit for purpose, have a positive impact on residents’ health and well-being, provide adequate space for occupants’ amenities and enable greater adaptability in terms of lifetime change.

2. The National Technical Standard

2.1 In March 2015, the Government introduced a ‘Nationally Described Space Standard’ (or National Standard for short). This sets out more detailed minimum standards than the previous Design and Quality Standards. The full standards are available on the Government’s website¹ and reproduced in Appendix 1, and should be read as a whole. However a summary table is provided below.

Table 1 - Minimum gross internal floor areas and storage (m²) Number of bedrooms (b)

| Number of bedrooms (b) | Number of bed spaces (persons) | 1 storey dwellings | 2 storey dwellings | 3 storey dwellings | Built-in storage |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1b | 1p | 39 (37) ¹² | | | 1.0 |
| | 2p | 50 | 58 | | 1.5 |
| 2b | 3p | 61 | 70 | | 2.0 |
| | 4p | 70 | 79 | | |
| 3b | 4p | 74 | 84 | 90 | 2.5 |
| | 5p | 86 | 93 | 99 | |
| | 6p | 95 | 102 | 108 | |
| 4b | 5p | 90 | 97 | 103 | 3.0 |
| | 6p | 99 | 106 | 112 | |
| | 7p | 108 | 115 | 121 | |
| | 8p | 117 | 124 | 130 | |
| 5b | 6p | 103 | 110 | 116 | 3.5 |
| | 7p | 112 | 119 | 125 | |
| | 8p | 121 | 128 | 134 | |
| 6b | 7p | 116 | 123 | 129 | 4.0 |
| | 8p | 125 | 132 | 138 | |

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524531/160519_Nationally_Described_Space_Standard_Final_Web_version.pdf

² Where a one person flat has a shower room rather than a bathroom, the floor area may be reduced from 39m² to 37m²

2.2 In a Ministerial Statement² in 2015, the Government set out how they wished local planning authorities to implement the new National Standard. In cases where a Local Plan already included internal space standards, the following would apply:

"From 1 October 2015: Existing Local Plan, neighbourhood plan, and supplementary planning document policies relating to water efficiency, access and internal space should be interpreted by reference to the nearest equivalent new national technical standard. Decision takers should only require compliance with the new national technical standards where there is a relevant current Local Plan policy."

2.3 The Ministerial Statement also stated:

"Where policies relating to technical standards have yet to be revised, local planning authorities are advised to set out clearly how the existing policies will be applied in decision taking in light of this statement."

2.4 Planning Inspector T. Shields has recently dismissed a planning application within a residential area of a Lancashire town, for the development of four one-bed flats from the conversion of two single dwelling houses. The appeal was dismissed because of the flats' inadequate living and amenity space despite a housing shortfall in the area. He described "insufficient floor space would be harmful to living conditions of occupiers"³.

The Inspector held that the main issue was whether adequate living conditions existed indoors and outdoors for the occupiers. Inspector T. Shields referred to the DCLG 2015 Technical Housing Standards and noted the floor space for both ground and first floor flats fell below the minimum standards of 37 square metres, and on that basis, the conversions resulted in harm to the living conditions of the occupiers. With respect to outdoor living space for all four flats, the Inspector noted the small size of the yard, its lack of privacy, the poor accessibility of the yard for the occupiers of the first floor flats, and he concluded the space was deficient in terms of an unreasonable level of amenity. In the planning balance he found that the harm to the living conditions of occupiers outweighed the need for the housing.

2.5 Elsewhere, Planning Inspectors have also dismissed appeals on the grounds of the inadequate living conditions of future occupants⁴ in part due to the size of proposed units being less than that within the National Standard.

² Planning update March 2015, written statement to Parliament by the Rt. Hon. Sir Eric Pickles MP, 25th March 2015
<http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/planning-update-march-2015>

³ Planning Inspector; T.Shield's 3rd January 2017 decision regarding minimum space standards within a residential town of Lancashire. Appeal reference: APP/M2372/C/16/23158608 and APP/M2372/C/16/3158609

⁴ Appeal decisions: APP/L5240/W/15/3132116 - Croydon; APP/G5180/W/15/3129314 – Bromley; APP/Z5060/W/15/3137622 – Barking & Dagenham; APP/L3245/W/16/3142296 – Shropshire; APP/V5570/W/16/3149106 – Islington

3. Applying the National Space Standard in West Suffolk

3.1 In light of the above, **West Suffolk Council intends to require the National Space Standard for new residential (Use Class C3) development** as part of the review of its Local Plan. In the meantime, developers will have regard to this Technical Advice Note, in addition to complying with relevant policies within the current development plan, such as Joint Development Policies Document (JDMPD) Policy DM22 – Residential Design.

3.2 In addition to setting minimum overall internal space standards, the National Standard also sets out minimum space requirements for single and double/twin bedrooms, minimum headrooms for all rooms, and technical requirements for internal storage space.

"Within each new home, rooms and corridors should be comfortable, able to accommodate furniture and household equipment that would be expected in that part of the home, and allow for convenient circulation and access. Ceilings should allow sufficient headroom for people to live and move around; any spaces with insufficient headroom will not generally be counted as habitable space."

3.3 All of criteria set out in **a.** to **i.** in paragraph 10 of the Nationally Prescribed Standard should be applied for residential (Use Class C3) proposals in West Suffolk.

The Internal design standard requires that:

- a.** the dwelling provides at least the gross internal floor area and built-in storage area set out in Table 1 above
- b.** a dwelling with two or more bedspaces has at least one double (or twin) bedroom
- c.** in order to provide one bedspace, a single bedroom has a floor area of at least 7.5m² and is at least 2.15m wide
- d.** in order to provide two bedspaces, a double (or twin bedroom) has a floor area of at least 11.5m²
- e.** one double (or twin bedroom) is at least 2.75m wide and every other double (or twin) bedroom is at least 2.55m wide
- f.** any area with a headroom of less than 1.5m is not counted within the Gross Internal Area unless used solely for storage (if the area under the stairs is to be used for storage, assume a general floor area of 1m² within the Gross Internal Area)
- g.** any other area that is used solely for storage and has a head room of 900-1500mm (such as under eaves) is counted at 50% of its floor area, and any area lower than 900mm is not counted at all
- h.** a built-in wardrobe counts towards the Gross Internal Area and bedroom floor area requirements, but should not reduce the effective width of the room below the minimum widths set out above. The built-in area in excess of 0.72m² in a double bedroom and 0.36m² in a single bedroom counts towards the built-in storage requirement
- i.** the minimum floor to ceiling height is 2.3m for at least 75% of the Gross Internal Area

4. Outdoor space

4.1 All new residential units will be expected to have direct access to an area of private amenity space. The form of amenity space will be dependent on the form of housing and could include a private garden, roof garden, balcony, glazed winter garden or ground-level patio with defensible space from any shared amenity areas. In providing appropriate amenity space, developments should:

- j.** consider the location and context of the development, including the character of the surrounding area;
- k.** take into account the orientation of the amenity space in relation to the sun at different times of year;

- l. address issues of overlooking and enclosure, which may otherwise impact detrimentally on the proposed dwelling and any neighbouring dwellings; and
- m. design the amenity space to be of a shape, size and location to allow effective and practical use of and level access to the space by residents.

5. Accessible Homes

5.1 In order to create accessible homes:

- a. all housing development should be of a size, configuration and internal layout to enable Building Regulations requirement M4 (2) 'accessible and adaptable dwellings' to be met; and
- b. 5 per cent⁵ of the affordable housing component of every housing development providing or capable of acceptably providing 15 or more self-contained affordable homes⁶, should meet Building Regulations requirement M4 (3) 'wheelchair user dwellings' to be wheelchair accessible or be easily adapted for residents who are wheelchair users.

6. Conversion and sub-division of existing buildings

6.1 The Ministerial Statement states that the National Space Standard, where adopted by the Local Authority, should apply to new housing. New housing will include where an existing building (either an existing house or a building in non-residential use) is converted into flats or smaller dwelling units. The National Space Standards, as related above, will apply to such developments where planning permission is required.

6.2 However some residential development can be created under permitted development rights. An example is where a non-residential building is proposed for conversion into flats: provided that no physical external work is required which requires planning permission, this can usually be achieved through a 'prior approval' process. In such instances, the local planning authority has no power to seek particular standards or conditions. Therefore the space standards are not applicable to these types of developments.

7. Compliance with the National Standard

7.1. Compliance with the criteria should be demonstrated in the Planning statement and drawings submitted with residential planning applications.

8. Why are Minimum Space Standard required for West Suffolk.

8.1 The Minimum Space Standard (National Standard) will enable the construction of new (market and affordable) dwellings within West Suffolk of a good quality, that are fit for purpose, including providing an adequate level of amenity for future occupants. The National Standard reinforces existing policies within the development plan such as JDMPD Policy DM22 on Residential Design, which seeks high quality design.

8.2 Another of the rationales for including a requirement for minimum space standards is because of the rented tenure on affordable homes, which have to be fully occupied to avoid attracting an under-occupancy penalty (bedroom tax). The Council's housing allocations policy reflects this. The removal of the HCA Housing Quality Indicators system (as a measure of the quality of affordable homes), means that there is no longer a safeguard in place to ensure that

⁵ Rounded up to the nearest whole unit.

⁶ Part M of the Building Regulations generally does not apply to dwellings resulting from a conversion or a change of use. Additional guidance on the applicable requirements of the Building Regulations (amended 2015) can be found in: Approved Document M Access to and use of buildings Volume 1: Dwellings.

affordable housing is built to a reasonable size standard. The absence of any regulation of space standards means that developers have no incentive to ensure that homes (that will need to be occupied to maximum capacity), are fit for purpose.

8.2 In light of the above, West Suffolk Council considers the Government's national space standards as the minimum acceptable space standards that should be applied to build both open market and affordable housing within West Suffolk.

8.3 It is the intention of West Suffolk Council to include a policy requirement for all new homes to be built to the national space standards in the next version of their Local Plan. This Technical Advice Note is therefore an interim measure until such time as we go out to public consultation on our emerging combined West Suffolk Local Plan.

9. Contact

9.1 Please use the following contacts to ask any questions you may have on the content of this note.

Strategic Housing on housing.development@westsuffolk.gov.uk or 01638 719344 or
Planning Policy on planning.policy@westsuffolk.gov.uk or 01284 757368

Appendix 1: Nationally Described Space Standard

Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard

March 2015 Department for Communities and Local Government

Introduction

1. This standard deals with internal space within new dwellings and is suitable for application across all tenures. It sets out requirements for the Gross Internal (floor) Area of new dwellings at a defined level of occupancy as well as floor areas and dimensions for key parts of the home, notably bedrooms, storage and floor to ceiling height.
2. The requirements of this standard for bedrooms, storage and internal areas are relevant only in determining compliance with this standard in new dwellings and have no other statutory meaning or use.

Using the space standard

3. The standard Gross Internal Areas set out in Table 1 are organised by storey height to take account of the extra circulation space needed for stairs to upper floors, and deal separately with one storey dwellings (typically flats) and two and three storey dwellings (typically houses).
4. Individual dwelling types are expressed with reference to the number of bedrooms (denoted as 'b') and the number of bedspaces (or people) that can be accommodated within these bedrooms (denoted as 'p'). A three bedroom (3b) home with one double bedroom (providing two bed spaces) and two single bedrooms (each providing one bed space) is therefore described as 3b4p.
5. This allows for different combinations of single and double/twin bedrooms to be reflected in the minimum Gross Internal Area. The breakdown of the minimum Gross Internal Area therefore allows not only for the different combinations of bedroom size, but also for varying amounts of additional living, dining, kitchen and storage space; all of which are related to the potential occupancy.
6. Relating internal space to the number of bedspaces is a means of classification for assessment purposes only when designing new homes and seeking planning approval (if a local authority has adopted the space standard in its Local Plan). It does not imply actual occupancy, or define the minimum for any room in a dwelling to be used for a specific purpose other than in complying with this standard.
7. Minimum floor areas and room widths for bedrooms and minimum floor areas for storage are also an integral part of the space standard. They cannot be used in isolation from other parts of the design standard or removed from it.
8. The Gross Internal Area of a dwelling is defined as the total floor space measured between the internal faces of perimeter walls¹ that enclose the dwelling. This includes partitions, structural elements, cupboards, ducts, flights of stairs and voids above stairs. The Gross Internal Area should be measured and denoted in square metres (m²).
9. The Gross Internal Areas in this standard will not be adequate for wheelchair housing (Category 3 homes in Part M of the Building Regulations) where additional internal area is required to accommodate increased circulation and functionality to meet the needs of wheelchair households.

Technical requirements

10. The standard requires that:

The Internal design standard requires that:

- n. the dwelling provides at least the gross internal floor area and built-in storage area set out in Table 1 below
- o. a dwelling with two or more bedspaces has at least one double (or twin) bedroom
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- v. the minimum floor to ceiling height is 2.3m for at least 75% of the Gross Internal Area

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