

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 6 June 2016

Report of: Head of Regeneration and Development

Title: Approval for consultation of proposed changes to the section of the Residential Design Guide from paragraph 7.3.5 to 7.3.9 including the table at 7.3.6 showing minimum internal space standards in line with the optional National Standards Introduced by Government in March 2015.

1.0 **Summary**

- 1.1 In March 2015 Government introduced an optional national standard for internal space in new housing. Local Authorities are only permitted to use the new national standards where they have an existing policy (as at March 2015) in place requiring adherence to a local standard or a new policy relating to the new national standard. The ministerial statement issued in March 2015 on this matter (updated) considers that standards set out in Supplementary Planning Documents are included in this and allows internal space standards to be interpreted by reference to the new national standards.
- 1.2 However, this can be confusing for applicants when applying for new housing schemes as the standards in the Adopted Residential Design Guide (RDG) are not the same as the national standards. The proposed change involves amending the table at Para 7.3.6 of the RDG to reflect the national standards.
- 1.3 To ensure that the internal space standards can be required for all new housing development we will add a new policy to the publication version of the Local Plan 2 stating that all new residential development should comply with the standards set out in the RDG, including the national space standards. At present the only explicit reference to the RDG is in the supporting text for adopted policy UD1 in the Core Strategy.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet are asked approve for consultation the proposed changes to the table at 7.3.6 of the RDG as adopted in 2014.
- 2.2 To allow any post consultation changes of a minor nature to be agreed and signed off as the Council's adopted guidance by the Head of Regeneration and Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development
- 2.3 Delegated authority is also requested for the Head of Regeneration and Development in consultation with Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development to approve further regulatory or minor changes until such time as there is a full review of the RDG.

Contact Officer: For further information on this report please contact: Sian Finney MacDonald Urban Design and Conservation Manager.
telephone extension: 8278 email:sian.finney-macdonald@watford.gov.uk

Report approved by: Jane Custance, Head of Regeneration and Development

3.0 Detailed proposal

3.1.1 Background

3.1.2 At 7th July 2014 Cabinet meeting the revised Residential Design Guide (RDG) was adopted. One of the key discussion points and changes in the new guide is the internal space standards table at para 7.3.6 of the 2014 RDG. The Cabinet report for the July 7th meeting included an appendix setting out how the proposed new standards had been arrived at. At the time, there was discussion at a national level regarding a possible national standard and the merits of the standards set out in the London Housing Design Guide 2010.

3.1.3 A review of the standards used by other authorities was made by the policy team along with an assessment of what had actually been given permission in Watford during the preceding 12 months. In internal discussions with colleagues across the planning section it was felt that, whilst the standards as set out in the London Guide are useful and widely used, they were overly complex and we should simplify them for use in Watford. On this basis a simplified version was proposed and included in the RDG as adopted (the main table is set out below).

The main table sets out the basic requirement, but this is supplemented by further requirements in relation to bedroom and living areas which requires an increase in floor space as the number of bed spaces increases; so a 1 bedroom unit with 2 bed spaces requires more floor space than a 1 bedroom unit with a single bed space.

Gross Internal Area :

Dwelling type (bedrooms / persons)	Minimum GIA (square metres)
1 bedroom (includes studio flats)	37
2 bedrooms	61
3 bedrooms	74
4 bedrooms	90

Table showing the minimum bedroom sizes dependent on designed occupancy;

Bedroom size	Minimum floor area of bedroom (square metres)
Single	8
Double / twin	12

Table showing the minimum living dependent on designed occupancy:

Designed occupancy	Minimum combined floor area of living, dining and kitchen spaces (square metres)
2 bed spaces	23
3 bed spaces	25
4 bed spaces	27
5 bed spaces	29
6 bed spaces	31

- 3.1.4 The optional national standards are shown in the table set out below and take account of the number of bed spaces per unit as well as the bedrooms and consider the additional space needed to accommodate circulation space within multi-storey units; storage space is also required which reflects what is set out in para 7.3.9 of the RDG:

Table 1 Minimum gross internal floor areas and storage (m2)

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)*			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	

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

- 3.1.5 It can be seen from looking at these two tables that the standards shown in the RDG are at the lower end of the standards for each size based on number of bedrooms. There will be an impact on housing schemes coming forwards once the optional standard is adopted as developers will have to provide more floor space per unit than they do under the current RDG standards. However, since the national space standards were issued developers have been advised to use these in favour of those shown in the RDG.
- 3.1.6 The proposed change to this table will clarify the position and bring our own document up to date in respect of the national standards.
- 3.1.7 The supporting tables relating to bedroom size and the text at paragraph 7.3.9 should be amended to bring them up to date with the national standards and technical requirements. The bedroom sizes will be changed so that the single bedroom size is a minimum of 7.5 sq m minimum but a minimum width requirement of 2.15m; the two person bedroom size will be 11.5 sqm in area and at least 2.75m wide in the case of the first two person room and 2.55m wide for every subsequent two person room.
- 3.1.8 In terms of the storage areas there is no minimum standard provision but there are

constraints around what can be included in the gross internal area (GIA). These constraints include:

- 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)
- any other area that is used solely for storage and has a headroom 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
- 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
- the minimum floor to ceiling height is 2.3m for at least 75% of the Gross Internal Area

3.1.9 The proposed changes are shown on the Appendix document.

3.1.10 To ensure that the Council complies fully with the conditions set out in the Ministerial Statement regarding the use of the optional national standards it is proposed to include a new policy in the emerging Local Plan 2 in the Urban Design and The Historic Environment Chapter explicitly requiring that all new residential development complies with the guidelines in the RDG including the national internal space standard. This will be policy UD5 and will be consulted on at the same time as the proposed changes to the RDG in June.

4.0 **Implications**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 There are no financial implications contained within this report.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 Currently the adopted Core Strategy policies do not refer explicitly for the need for all new development to comply with the guidance in the RDG; it is referred to in the supporting text for UD1 at paragraphs 12.1.4 and 12.1.5 where the design framework is outlined and in the Housing chapter at paragraph 8.2.2 which supports HS2 housing mix.

4.2.2 In the Ministerial Statement setting out the national standards the section on Decision taking, transition and compliance is not absolutely clear on whether going forwards guidance which is contained in a supplementary planning document is considered to be policy. It states:

“ 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.”

4.2.3 To ensure that we comply with this requirement going forwards it is proposed to introduce a new policy at the publication stage of Local Plan 2 which explicitly states that we expect all new housing development to comply with the guidance set out in the RDG, which includes the national space standards.

4.3 **Equalities**

4.3.1 None

4.4 **Potential Risks**

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Developers being caught between a pre-application based on one set of figures and submission when the new standards would apply. This can be resolved by issuing a note stating how we are treating applications.	2	4	8

4.5 **Staffing**

4.5.1 This will clarify the existing situation and avoid staff having to explain to developers what we are doing.

4.6 **Accommodation**

4.6.1 n/a

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 n/a

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 Issues of sustainability have been considered and incorporated in the document.

Appendices

Appendix 1

- Revised RDG guide section showing changes.

Background Papers

- Ministerial Statement 25th March 2015
- Technical Housing Standards – nationally described space standard March 2015

File Reference

- None.