

# Hastings Local Plan – Policy DM3 f) Space Standards within the Home Evidence Report

February 2014

## 1.0 The Issue

- 1.1 Space is an important factor when people are choosing a home, but there is a strong perception that newly built homes are not big enough. A 2010 Yougov poll carried out for the RIBA revealed that only 1 in 4 people would consider buying a home built within the last 10 years, mainly because rooms were too small. (*The case for Space RIBA 2011*). Lack of storage space is a particular problem. Analysis by the RIBA of EU Housing statistics quoted in "*The Case for Space*" shows that not only did the size of homes in the UK appear to be shrinking but they were also the smallest in Western Europe. Home buyers in Ireland could expect new homes to be 15% larger, in the Netherlands 53% larger and in Denmark 80% larger.
- 1.2 A report for CABI produced by University College London in 2010 "*Space Standards the Benefits*" examines the relevant research and concludes that there are benefits in terms of general health and well being in living in a home with adequate space to function well. If families have adequate space both to socialise and to find privacy when they want it, this reduces stress and improves family life generally, leading to fewer disputes. The contribution that adequate space makes to the opportunities for children to engage in uninterrupted private study, greatly improves their chances of academic attainment. Space also provides opportunities to work at home and the flexibility to adapt the home to changing needs and lifestyles. A reduction in aggressive and anti-social behaviour can also lead to reductions in crime.
- 1.3 The Borough Council therefore considers, as does the RIBA and other responsible bodies, that the case for adequate space standards in homes is a strong one. The Council believes that although design as an issue is best engaged with on a site specific basis (as per policy DM1), space is something that requires more general local guidance. This is to enable people to live comfortably and conveniently, but also to allow for the inclusion of sustainable building methods and requirements and for houses to be capable of supporting people as their life circumstances change. In a densely populated borough like Hastings it is especially important that people have adequate space within their homes. The Council has therefore adopted space standards in Policy DM3 of its Development Management Plan.
- 1.4 Objectors to the policy argue that it is too prescriptive to set minimum space standards, which far exceed those required by Housing Quality Indicators (HQI). The standards are not readily comparable, but in so far as they are, the Council's standards, which are discussed in more detail below, do not "far exceed" the HQI. For example the HQIs give a range of 82 to 95 sq metres depending on number of storeys, for a 5 bed space house. The Council standard for a 5 person house is 93 sq metres.
- 1.5 Objectors also argue that forcing developers to provide larger units will drive up the sales price, making them more out of reach of purchasers. It is argued that private purchasers should have the option to pay less for smaller property. It is accepted that cost is a factor but the important thing is to obtain the right balance between providing homes which are comfortable to live in and cost. The Council believes that its standards, which are by no means excessive, create that balance. The evidence quoted above does not suggest that people would choose smaller homes as a matter of "choice", in fact it suggests quite the reverse. It is wrong to encourage people to live in sub-standard housing with inadequate levels of internal space
- 1.6 A further objection is that the present Local Plan does not contain any minimum space standards and the Council has produced no evidence that this has given rise to poor standards of housing accommodation. The evidence at national level is there to see.

Many people consider modern houses to be too small and would not consider buying them. House size was not such an issue over ten years ago at the time that the adopted Local Plan was drawn up and the Council is merely seeking, in producing a replacement plan, to ensure that Hastings residents enjoy a reasonable level of amenity in their homes.

## 2.0 Policy Background

- 2.1 The adopted Hastings Local Plan 2004 contains a general policy DG1 on development form, which seeks to protect the amenity of residents of new development. As previously indicated, the Plan does not contain any specific space standards. The Council has taken the view that, against a background of reducing house sizes, if Hastings residents living conditions are to be properly protected, guideline minimum space standards should be incorporated in the emerging Development Management Plan. The following policy has therefore been incorporated in the new Plan.

### **Policy DM3 – General Amenity**

**In order to achieve a good living standard for future users of proposed development and its neighbours, it should be demonstrated that amenity has been considered and appropriate solutions have been incorporated into schemes. Permission will be given for development where:**

**f) Dwellings are designed to allow residents to live comfortably and conveniently with sufficient internal space. The guidelines for minimum internal floor areas are: 1 bedroom/ 2 person 51sq m : 2 bedroom/ 3 person 66sq m; 2 bedroom/ 4 person 77sq m; 3 bedroom/ 5 person 93sq m: 4 bedroom/ 6 person 106sq m.**

- 2.2 The Council's proposed standards are based on recommendations by English Partnerships (now part of HCA) from a report of 2007 called "*Places Homes People.*" The Council has found that these best meets its requirements. The proposed standards are comparable and in some cases lower than the space standards recently adopted by the Greater London Authority in its *London Housing Design Guide (Interim Edition)* of 2010. This requires 50sq metres for a 1 bed/ 2 person flat; 61 sq metres for a 2 bed/ 3 person flat; 83 sq metres for a 2 bed/ 4 person house; 96 sq metres for a 3 bed/ 5 person house and 107 sq metres for a 4 bed/ 6 person house.
- 2.3 More recently in August 2013 the Government consulted on a *Housing Standards Review*. The consultation ended in October 2013 but the Government has not yet announced its decision on the review, which included consideration of space standards within residential buildings. An Independent Industry Working Group has at the same time developed a set of illustrative Technical Standards, which sit alongside the consultation.
- 2.4 The Working Group has identified three distinct performance levels that provide increasing benefits in terms of accessibility. Baseline level 1 has broadly the same requirements as Part M of the Building Regulations and is very basic. Level 2 represents an intermediate accessible housing standard as an alternative to the Lifetime Homes Standard, which is the most commonly used standard at the present time. Level 3 represents the highest tier providing very good accessibility for most people, including the majority of wheelchair users. Level 2, which represents a reasonable but not excessive standard of amenity, proposes 48 sq metres for a 1 bed/ 2 person flat, 74 metres for 2 bed/ 3 person house, 83 sq metres for a 2 bed/ 4 person

house, 96 sq metres for a 3 bed/ 5person property and 109 sq metres for a 4 bed/ 6 person property.

- 2.5 It can therefore be seen that the guideline space standards proposed to be adopted by the Council are comparable and in many respects lower than similar standards. One of the options that the Government is looking at is a set of national space standards to be incorporated in the Building Regulations. Clearly if implemented these would take precedence.

### **3.0 Policy Support**

- 3.1 The policy supports a number of the objectives of the *Hastings Planning Strategy*, in particular Objective 2 “*ensure everybody has the opportunity to live in a decent home, which they can afford in a community in which they want to live*” and Objective 2c “*ensuring an appropriate mix of housing is provided in terms of tenure, price, type, size and location, having regard to the accommodation needs of the town.*”
- 3.2 There is also support for the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). One of the core land use planning principles in paragraph 17 of the Framework that should underpin plan making, is “*always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.*” A good standard of amenity for all should include adequate internal space provision in all new homes.