

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

20 MARCH 2018

Title:

**REVIEW OF HOUSING DESIGN STANDARDS –
INTERIM REPORT FROM MEMBER WORKING GROUP**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Carole King]
[Wards Affected: All]**

Summary and purpose:

The report sets out the interim recommendations from the Member Scrutiny Review Working Group into Housing Design Standards for New Council Homes. Good quality homes consist of well thought out and spacious internal design, provide adequate and well designed external amenity space and are high performing in terms of energy performance and sustainability. It is expected that the recommendations of this Scrutiny Review will inform the design proposals for Site C at Ockford Ridge and future housing development schemes.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

This report relates to the Council's Community Wellbeing Priority with the objective to continue to invest in the Council's housing stock to maintain decent homes and to deliver affordable housing across the Borough.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

The Working Group considered accessibility and adaptability standards as part of their scope. Other aspects of equality and diversity are considered within the body of the report.

Financial Implications:

Changes in design standards might have financial and viability implications on any future development schemes. If standards are increased they may increase development costs. Financial appraisals are completed for each new scheme as part of the budget approval process. This will include Site C Ockford Ridge when the scheme has been developed and the impact of changes can be measure in the first instance on this scheme.

Legal Implications:

In March 2015, the government published the "Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standard" (amended in 2016). These standards replaced the different

space standards previously used by local authorities. The technical standards remain within the planning system as a form of technical planning standard.

The standard was one of a wider housing standards review package. There are also optional building regulations requirements for access and water efficiency. Powers to introduce these optional requirements are included in the Building Act 1984 (as amended). The optional regulations and space standard can only be applied where there is a local plan policy based on evidenced local need and where the viability of development is not compromised. The review also clarified statutory building regulation guidance on waste storage to ensure it is properly considered in new housing development.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council adopted the current Housing Standards and Specifications in April 2014. When this report was brought to full Council it was recommended that as government guidance, building standards and best practice changes, current standards and specifications should be regularly reviewed to reflect these changes.
- 1.2 Since the Council adopted the new Design Standards and Specifications in 2014 the Government has concluded a Housing Standards Review (2015) that aimed to simplify government regulations and standards within a set of Building Regulations. The Government also provided further guidance on Housing Standards by introducing a new Technical Housing Space Standard.¹
- 1.3 The Housing Standards Review gave local authorities the optional requirement to require developers to build to higher standards than the minimum requirements in the Building Regulations Part M (Access to and use of buildings) and Part L (water usage). In addition the Government no longer requires local authorities to adopt the Code for Sustainable Homes as a planning condition for new developments.
- 1.4 The opportunity to review the Council's Design Standards for new Council Homes is therefore timely and will provide an opportunity to collect and review feedback from tenants in recent new builds to learn what aspects of design works well and what could be improved.
- 1.5 Waverley completed a review of its tender specification, which included some elements of design. The latest tender specification was produced in 2017 and is referenced in this report as the 'Draft Waverley General Design and Information Requirements 2017' (GDI). Any approved changes to the Design Standards will be incorporated into this tender specification.
- 1.6 Four councillors and one member of the Tenant's Panel, all members of the Housing O&S Committee, were assigned to form a Task Group to conduct a Scrutiny Review prior to the drafting of updated standards and specifications
- 1.7 The Scrutiny Review focussed on:

New homes developed and funded by Waverley Borough Council including;
 - General needs affordable housing for rent

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-housing-standards-nationally-described-space-standard>

- Internal design (space) standards, including internal storage space provision and potential use of roof space
- Accessibility and adaptability standards
- External space standards / gardens / amenity space
- Parking provision
- Materials – e.g shaver sockets/towel rails
- Opportunities for future proofing and adaptation to changing circumstances.

1.8 The Task Group has met five times and has reviewed internal design (space) standards, external space standards and building regulations and sustainability. Members have also been on site visits to a number of council housing sites, including Wey Court, Godalming (WBC scheme), Church View, Station Road, Godalming (WBC scheme) and Furze Lane, Farncombe (Croudace / Mount Green Housing Association); and are due to visit Site D at Ockford Ridge.

1.9 Each discussion set out to establish cost implications of any proposed changes mindful of the need to balance relative design quality with the number of homes that can be built for a given specification.

1.10 External expertise was brought in to inform discussions of sustainability and the use of roof space.

2. Interim Findings

INTERNAL DESIGN STANDARDS

Gross internal areas

2.1 Members reviewed the comparison of gross internal areas between Waverley's 2014 standards, the National Standards, other written guidance and a handful of examples from local authorities. Whilst Waverley's 2014 standards were not too dissimilar from the National Standards, Members agreed that the standards set out in the London Plan 2011 were a good standard to follow. The London Plan corresponded to the National Standards except for 2 bed/4 person house where it was slightly more generous. It was felt that standards in the London Plan would have been considered carefully in the context of cost of land, and the marginal increases in gross internal area over the National Standard were not extravagant. The proposed new standards are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Gross Internal Area

	1 bed/2 person Flat (m ²)	2 bed/4 person Flat (m ²)	2 bed/4 person House (m ²)	3 bed/5 person House (m ²)
Waverley 2014	48	70	83	96
National Standards 2015	50	70	79	86 (1 storey) 93 (2 storey) 99 (3 storey)

London Plan 2011	50	70	83	86 (1 storey) 96 (2 storey) 102 (3 storey)
Proposed new Waverley Standard	50	70 (no change)	83 (no change)	86 (1 storey) 96 (2 storey) 102 (3 storey)

Bedroom Size

- 2.2 **Members agreed that 12m² for the main double-bedroom was acceptable across all types of dwelling** and this was fairly standard across the other standards reviewed. Whilst the standard for a single bedroom was generally 7m² across the examples viewed.
- 2.3 **Members agreed the preferred single bedroom standard should be 7.5m² in accordance with the Draft Waverley General Design and Information Requirements 2017’.**

Living Spaces and Design Layouts

- 2.4 The Living area is defined as the lounge, kitchen and dining area. Members supported the adoption of the current preference for kitchen/diners rather than dining/living room as this was more convenient for modern living, and more practical for families and older people with mobility issues.
- 2.5 The current 2014 Design Standards did not specify the space required for the living area, but Members felt that the draft Waverley GDI 2017 requirements were low (18.5m² for a 1 bed/2 person flat and a 2 bed/4 person home). Members also felt that this did not allow for additional living space needed when there are more people in the home. The London Plan 2011 standard increased the living area by 2m² for each additional person and this was felt to be a reasonable approach and should be proposed for Waverley’s new Design Standards.

Table 2: Living Spaces and Design Layout

	1 bed/2 person Flat (m ²)	2 bed/4 person Flat (m ²)	2 bed/4 person House (m ²)	3 bed/5 person House (m ²)
London Plan 2011	23	27	27	29
Proposed new Waverley Standard	23	27	27	29

Internal Storage

- 2.6 Storage space was defined and included kitchen cabinets and useable space in an airing cupboard. Waverley current standards specify 2.5m² of internal storage for a 1 bed / 2 person flat and a 2 bed / 4 person home. This increases to 3.0m² for a 3 bed 5 person home.
- 2.7 Member's proposals were in line with the draft Waverley 2017 GDI's as Members felt that the amount of storage space should increase in line with the number of bed-spaces in the home.

Table 3: Internal Storage

	1 bed/2 person Flat (m ²)	2 bed/4 person Flat (m ²)	2 bed/4 person House (m ²)	3 bed/5 person House (m ²)
Waverley 2014	2.5	-	2.5	3.0
Proposed new Waverley standard	2.5 (no change to 2014 Standard)	3.0	3.0	3.5

EXTERNAL APPERANCES

Car Parking

- 2.8 The Waverley Parking Guidance (2013) sets out standards for general use car parking. The guidance is based off 'Surrey Design' (2002) and the minimum sizes are 2.4m x 4.8m. Members considered the draft Waverley 2017 GDI's and were satisfied with these requirements which were 2.4m x 4.8m for bays and 3.3m x 4.8m for in-curtilage parking.

Table 4: Car parking for general use

	Size of space (minimum in m)
Waverley Parking Guidance (2013)	3.3m x 4.8m
Proposed new Waverley Standard	As above (no change)

- 2.9 Members also specified standards for disabled parking bays:

Table 5: Disabled parking bays

	Size of space (minimum in m)
Waverley Parking Guidance (2013).	3.6m x 5m

Proposed new Waverley Standard	3.6m preferable with an additional demarcated area of 1.2m at the rear to enable wheelchair access (Building for life Standard)
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Members also expressed preference for there to be a continued distinction between the numbers of spaces in an urban and rural setting by following the existing Waverley Parking Guidelines 2013.

Cycle Parking

- 2.10 The standard for cycle parking spaces across the examples presented to Members was one traditional Sheffield hoop-stand per dwelling. Waverley has traditionally provided a 6' x 4' shed with a secure locking point inside for each dwelling with private amenity (garden) space. Members recommended that some provision for cycle parking supported Waverley's Health and Wellbeing agenda, **and should be continued**. It was further recognised that the increase in use of e-bikes may in future justify secure cycle parking.
- 2.11 Members heard that Waverley's flatted blocks were provided with 1 hoop stand per dwelling in a communal area. **Members felt that there should be capacity for visitors, and if play areas are provided in a development, 'A' frame stands should be incorporated.**

Outside Amenity space (Garden size)

- 2.12 Waverley's minimum garden size for all individual dwellings is 50m². Members felt that 50m² was generous for a 1-bed/2 person home and agreed to reduce the garden size for all 1 and 2 bed flats to a minimum of 25m². Members felt however, that 25m² would be too small for a family home with children, and agreed that a range of minimum sizes starting at 25m² for a 1-bed/2 person home ranging up to 60m² for a 3 or 4 bed home was more appropriate guidance for the Design Standards.

Table 7: Garden space size

	1 and 2 bed flat	2 bed house	3 bed house	4 bed house	5 bed house
Waverley 2014	50m ²				
Proposed New Waverley Standard	25m²	50m²	60m²	60m²	60m²

Landscaping (footpaths and pathways)

- 2.13 Members noted that the Manual for Streets provided the primary guidance for landscaping. Adequate space was needed to accommodate children's buggies

(double buggies up to 1m wide), mobility scooters, or a person pushing a cycle.
Members recommended a minimum width of 1.2m to building entrances.

BUILDING REGULATIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Energy and CO2 emissions

- 2.14 Waverley Current Design Standards (2014) worked to the equivalent of Code level 4 (deliver a minimum 25% improvement in energy preservation and CO2 emission reduction for the dwelling emission rate (DER) 2010. As a challenge to conventional standards, and also a possible opportunity to reduce fuel poverty problems, Members invited an external architect to present the Passivhaus Standard.
- 2.15 Members concluded that this standard would be too costly to achieve (a 17% uplift in costs compared to the CfSH level 4) and that it also relied on a high degree of adherence to operational requirements by tenants, which could not be guaranteed. They did however, agree that going beyond the Standards set out in Building Regulations (minimum 6% carbon dioxide saving relative to Part L 2010) and the Code for Sustainable Homes (minimum 19% relative to Part L in 2013) was desirable. **Members therefore recommended that Waverley should aspire to meet the targets and requirements set out in the current London Plan for a minimum 35% improvement in Dwelling Emission Rate (DER) on site relative to Part L of the 2013 Building Regulations.**
- 2.16 Members also discussed the requirements for access to and use of buildings and water usage as an optional technical requirement described in the revised set of Building Regulations. **The recommendations for these optional requirements can be found in table 8 and table 9.**

Table 8: Optional Technical Requirement – Water usage

Legislation	Water
Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 / Waverley 2014	> 105 litres of water per persons per day equates to levels 3 and 4
Building Regulations	>125 litre's per person per day (115 litre's per person per day for optional requirement)
Proposed new Waverley Standard	> 105 litres of water per day per person (no change)

Table 9: Optional Technical Requirement – Access to and use of building

(Please see figure1, page 8 for the definitions of levels of access)

Waverley 2014	M4 level 2 for of the accessible and adaptable requirements for all general use dwellings. M4 level 3 for wheelchair user dwellings.
Proposed new Waverley Standard	<p>Level of access and adaptability will be defined by type of building:</p> <p>Flats: to be M4 level 2 compliant on the first floor would need to have a lift so not practical to specify as a minimum requirement. However where flats/maisonettes were provided the ground floor could be required at M4 level 2 standard.</p> <p>General need dwelling: M4 level 2.</p> <p>Wheelchair user dwelling: M4 level 3.</p>

Figure 1: M4 Categories for Access to and use of buildings

- Requirement M4 (1): Category 1 – Visitable dwellings.
 - Compliance with this requirement is achieved when a new dwelling makes reasonable provision for most people, which includes wheelchair users to access and enter the dwelling, and access habitable rooms and sanitary facilities on the entrance level
- Requirement M4 (2): Category 2 – Accessible and adaptable dwellings.
 - Step free access from parking to the dwelling, and to a ground floor WC, with provision for wheelchair users and the elderly
 - Wall mounted switches and sockets high enough for occupants with reduced reach
 - Capability for adaptations in later life or for disabled occupants
- Requirement M4 (3): Category 3 – Wheelchair user dwellings.
 - Fully adapted or adaptable dwellings for wheelchair users. The requirements of this option are more comprehensive and supersede those above

Roof Space

2.17 The current approach set out in the Waverley 2014 Design Standards was for roof space not to be available to tenants for storage. A presentation from an external architect demonstrated that modern design practices can easily accommodate additional living space in the roof area with no adverse impact on insulation and at no significant incremental cost. Members felt however, that having a habitable room within the space of the loft was a cost benefit as it would provide an additional bedroom without increasing the buildings footprint. Whilst Members recognised the benefit of having the potential to extend properties in to the roof,

they also felt that by not designing built in habitable use of the roof space would be a missed opportunity. However Members rejected the idea of converting lofts for the sole use of creating additional storage space, but recognised that by creating a habitable space would create additional storage capacity in the eaves of the loft.

- 2.18 Members felt that a mix of dwellings with and without use of the roof space for habitable use added visual interest to the street scene by varying the height and pitch of the roofline, but were made aware that 1 and 2 bed homes were in large demand in Waverley and therefore there was less need to build into the loft space in smaller homes. **Members recommended that the Waverley Standards should include a design element for loft space to incorporate a habitable bedroom and that this should only apply to house types with 3 + bedrooms and would therefore vary scheme to scheme.**

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 Subject to the comments of the Housing O&S Committee, Officers intend incorporating the findings of the Task Group into a revision of Waverley's Housing Design Standards, which will be brought to the next Housing O&S meeting and then taken to Executive and full Council during the Summer.
- 3.2 The Task Group will continue to scrutinise the drafting of the updated standards.
- 3.3 The updated standards will be used to inform design decisions for the Ockford Ridge Site C development.

Recommendation

For Members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note and comment on the proposed new design standards contained in this report.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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