

June 2008

Scrutiny investigation

Room sizes in new housing developments



Findings and recommendations by

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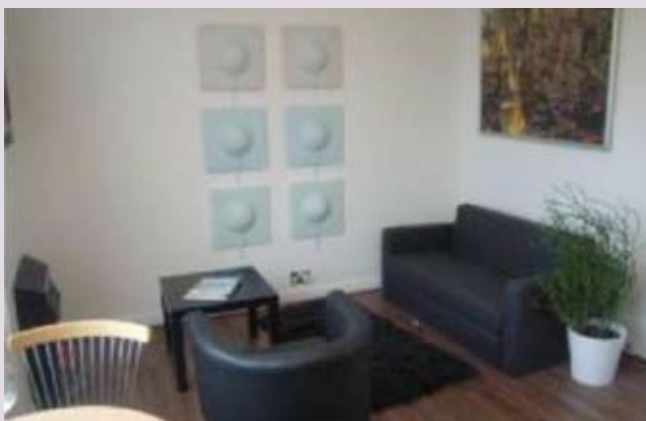
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A comparison between the room sizes of traditional terraced houses and new-build properties in Croydon

Room sizes of traditional “two up two down” terraced houses in Croydon

Property	Living room and kitchen (separate rooms)	Bedroom 1	Bedroom 2
1	28.44 m ²	11.22 m ²	10.88 m ²
2	28.08 m ²	11.77 m ²	8.77 m ²
3	31.95 m ²	8.45 m ²	10.87 m ²
4	24.05 m ²	9.11 m ²	12.11 m ²
5	24.30 m ²	12.84 m ²	12.66 m ²
6	26.91 m ²	10.20 m ²	11.05 m ²

Room sizes of six properties visited during this review (further examples in Appendix 2)

	Living room and kitchen (open plan)	Bedroom 1	Bedroom 2
1	24.22 m ²	11.41 m ²	7.90 m ²
2	25.55 m ²	11.22 m ²	7.94 m ²
3	23.65 m ²	14.62 m ²	6.71 m ²
4	9.80 m ²	6.18 m ²	12.45 m ²
5	27.31 m ²	10.56 m ²	6.22 m ²
6	26.20 m ²	13.29 m ²	7.06 m ²

Ranges of recommended room sizes in various London Boroughs' Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on internal space standards. *(Figures collected from London Boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Merton, Sutton, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Waltham Forest).*

Living room	Kitchen	Double bedroom	Single bedroom
11 - 18.6 m ²	5.5 - 9.8 m ²	10 - 11 m ²	6.5 m ²

Foreword



by Councillor Donald Speakman

Having a proper home in which to raise their family is the ambition of most people. In this respect, accommodation must have rooms large enough to absorb with comfort the activities of family life.

Wherever you go in Croydon at present, you will see a great deal of building taking place. New homes are very welcome as they help to reduce the housing shortage for tenants as well as for home-owners.

For these new homes to be a genuine investment for the future, however, quality needs to go with quantity. We have a particular concern with the small size of rooms in new-build developments. Family homes need to be designed to cater comfortably for at least two growing children, as 2001 census figures show the average number of children in a Croydon family to be 1.8.

This concern led Croydon's Scrutiny Members to embark on an investigation of room sizes and regulations governing these. This was carried out by a working group consisting of Councillors Donald Speakman, Yvette Hopley, Brian Cakebread, Tony Harris, and Raj Rajendran, who visited a number of new housing developments to see their interiors for themselves.

The group was surprised to find that not only is there no regulation on space standards in the private house-building industry, but that efforts from any council to draw these up as part of their planning strategy have been resisted by the Planning Inspectorate (which is an executive agency of The Department for Communities and Local Government and The National Assembly of Wales). The building industry is therefore free to build very small new homes without having to

face the long-term social consequences of small and inadequate housing. Purchasers are paying more whilst room sizes are diminishing.

One clear conclusion of this investigation and visits carried out is that we need regulation on internal space standards, not just for Croydon but for all of London and beyond, to create an even playing field where developers and builders know they must build all homes to acceptable standards, and where planning officers can enforce adequate internal room standards, knowing that they will be supported by local regulations and by the Planning Inspectorate.

Urgent action by the Government is needed to set adequate internal space standards and we hope this investigation will contribute to the debate. As a society, we should only tolerate good quality homes, where parents and their children can lead healthy and successful lives.

On behalf of the Working Group, I would like to extend our thanks to the following officers for their useful contributions to this review: Rory MacLeod (Head of Planning Control), Alan Webber (Head of Policy and Strategy), Hilda Lee (Senior Planner - Policy and Strategy), and Ilona Kytomaa (Scrutiny Support Officer).

Cllr Donald Speakman (Chairman)

The Recommendations

- R1** - That the Council should include policies relating to internal space standards in its Development Control Policies suite as part of the Local Development Framework, in order to provide planning officers with a robust framework with which to uphold adequate internal spaces standards for all new-build housing developments in the borough.
- R2** - That the properties to be built in Croydon through the Housing Special Purpose vehicle should emulate the Housing Corporation's Design and Quality Standards, and provide homes in which families can lead a healthy life and where children are provided adequate private space, in which they can enjoy their leisure time, pursue their studies and secure good educational qualifications.
- R3** - That the Council should make representations to the Mayor of London, to include adequate internal space standards in its Housing Strategy, in order to create an even playing field for the building industry within the capital and require all developers to produce new homes with adequate internal space standards, so that new homes can meet the social, educational and health needs of families and adapt to the evolving needs of households with growing children and provide high quality accommodation in the capital for several decades to come.
- R4** - That the Council should make representations to the South-West London Housing Partnership, to include adequate internal space standards in its strategies and guidance, in order to maximise good practice within the boroughs represented and produce high quality homes which can adapt to the changing needs of families with growing children and provide good accommodation in these boroughs for several decades to come.
- R5** - In the light of the house-building industry's lack of accountability for the long-term impact of developments on its occupants, that the Council should make representations to the Department for Communities and Local Government to highlight the need for robust regulations regarding internal space standards, as argued in this review as well as several previous studies, in order to provide good housing both for home-owners and for tenants renting properties from private landlords or as temporary housing association accommodation.

Organisations

CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
GLA	Greater London Authority
LHF	London Housing Federation
NHBC	National House Building Federation
The Planning Inspectorate	The Planning Inspectorate is an Executive Agency of The Department for Communities and Local Government and The National Assembly of Wales

Policies, regulations, grants, etc.

D&QS	The Housing Corporation's Design and Quality Standards
HAG	Housing Association Grant
HHSRS	Housing Health and Safety Rating System for assessing the condition of residential property, introduced in the Housing Act 2004
HQI	Housing Quality Indicators
LDF	Local Development Framework - a borough's framework of planning policies
LHA	Local Housing Allowance - housing benefit for private tenants
PPS3	Planning Policy Statement 3 - a national planning policy
SDS	The Housing Corporation's Scheme Development Standards for new housing
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document - a guidance document on a specific issue
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance - the former name for SPD
SHG	The Housing Corporations' Social Housing Grant which funds house-building



1

The background and aims of this investigation

In 2006/7, more new homes were built in London than any time since the 1970s. 27,290 new-build homes were erected in Greater London, 34% of which were classified as affordable.

Any sign of respite to the capital's housing shortage must be welcomed, as the population of London is projected to grow from an official population of 7,512,400 (as of mid-2006) to 8.1 million by 2016. However, quantity needs to be accompanied with quality, particularly in view of the long-term impacts of new housing developments. More specifically, are new homes being designed to provide spacious enough accommodation, to cater for the everyday needs of London's families and their evolving circumstances?

The government's house-building programme relies on high densities to make good use of scarce and costly land. What conditions are required for high density building to provide good quality homes? What risks to the local community and the environment need to be highlighted as hundreds of new properties are erected in each London borough every year?

The last six decades have witnessed several waves of house-building and significant fluctuations in quality. In particular, room sizes in new developments have varied from generous proportions to far smaller dimensions in the 1990s and thereafter.

Concerns have been raised regarding current internal space standards in a number of recent studies:

1. An investigation by the Planning and Spatial Development Committee of the London Assembly, '**Size Matters**' (June 2006) reviewed evidence on the factors impacting delivery of affordable housing, and particularly family housing. It highlighted the lack of affordable family homes in London and raised concerns about the size mix of properties being built, highlighting developers' trend of allocating the minimum amount of space possible to affordable housing.

While the study makes a case for a greater supply of family housing, particularly for larger households, it also supports the establishment of internal space standards to maintain minimum standards in new-build developments.

2. A study commissioned by the Greater London Authority London Plan team, '**Housing Space Standards**' (August 2006) examined trends in space standards and dwelling mix in the UK. They noted widespread anecdotal reports of shrinking room sizes, considered how overcrowded conditions might affect well-being, particularly for children, and pressed for good quality housing developments which "*would create a suitable and sustainable living environment for now and future generations*". The authors put forward detailed proposals for baseline internal space standards in key habitable parts of new dwellings.

Another, earlier study, commissioned by the London Housing Federation, **'Capital Gains: making high density housing work in London'**, investigated high-density housing estates from a different angle. It examined eight successful and typical London housing schemes built to very high density (81-455 dwellings per hectare), seven of which were managed by housing associations and one by a local authority, and investigated factors which contributed towards residents' view of their homes and which made these high-density estates function effectively. It noted that, while fully occupied when first let, many properties examined had a spare bedroom or bed space, which contributed to the occupants' satisfaction with their homes.

The study drew a number of conclusions regarding what constitutes a successful development, emphasising the need for good management and maintenance (long-term costs which erode the short-term savings from building small properties), and the importance of striving for sustainable, integrated and inclusive communities, to make a high density development successful. It noted that *"while good design alone cannot ensure success, bad design is a major cause of scheme failure"*.



The aims of this investigation

The aims of this investigation have been to investigate what regulations are in place to enforce adequate internal space standards, and whether room sizes in recently built developments are adequate for the daily activities of families. In addition, it has sought to understand the possible effects of undersized homes on families and the local environment and the consequences of having to contend with cramped housing developments in the long term.

Visits carried out to obtain evidence regarding room sizes in new developments focused particularly on the lower end of the home ownership market and on the most common type of family home, the two bedroom dwelling. It became clear in the course of this investigation that the home ownership market is less tightly regulated than the social housing sector and particularly vulnerable to developers' need to maximise their profits in a climate of high land costs (particularly in Greater London) and to their awareness that some people are desperate to get on to the lowest rung of the property ladder. In addition, the buy-to let market has drawn many investors into the new-build housing sector, with possible impacts on the housing conditions of future private tenants.

The study puts forward recommendations for improvements in enforcing internal space standards, which it is hoped will make a positive contribution and play a part in leading to the building of a new housing stock which will be valued and cared for by its occupants for many decades to come.

2

What national and local policies say about room sizes

National government policies relating to new housing

National planning policy and principles emphasize the need for good quality design, and acknowledge the needs of certain groups which may not have a strong voice, e.g. children.

Children have the double disadvantage of not always being able to recognise or articulate their need for space and privacy, and of being given little or no opportunity to voice their needs as economic criteria often dominate families' decision-making processes when acquiring a new home.

Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) acknowledges *“the accommodation requirements of specific groups, in particular, families with children, older and disabled people”* (Page 9, para 21).

The Government Green Paper ‘Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable’ advocated that *“new homes and places meet everyone’s needs, by embedding principles of inclusive design in new development and addressing the needs of particular groups, for example children and older people”* (page 57, introduction to Chapter 6).



The aim of improving design in new homes is also enshrined in rating systems such as the Eco-homes rating system and its replacement, the Code for Sustainable Homes, which came into force in April 2007, and standards such as Lifetime Homes , which are to be applied in all new housing, as stipulated in the London Plan (the planning strategy for the capital).

The Code for Sustainable Homes aims to provide a single national standard to be used in the design and construction of new homes in England, and adoption of the Code is intended to encourage continuous improvement in sustainable home building.

However, the assessment system of the Code for Sustainable Homes allows only 1 non-mandatory credit for the provision of adequate “private space” within the section addressing “health and well-being” issues, for which applications can be granted a maximum of 30 points. Looking closer at the rating system, this credit is only to be allocated for providing outdoor space. This will not be seen as a safe option during dark winter evenings, or of much value during days of wet or cold weather, both all too familiar elements of the UK climate.

Lifetime Homes standards, developed in 1991 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Lifetime Homes Group to make new houses or flats adaptable to the changing needs of most households (e.g. the onset of disability or illness, the arrival of new children, or accidents), thus preventing unnecessary house moves and the upheaval these represent.

However, the findings of this investigation suggest that these principles of accessibility, flexibility and sustainability are not

being implemented in all new housing developments, and that new properties are being erected with cramped room sizes, little room for storage, and thus little room to adapt to a family's changing needs. Lifetime Homes standards make provision for wide, wheel-chair friendly corridors, but not for adequately sized bedrooms, which may thus lose space to generously proportioned passageways.

Local government policies

While no current national government policies contain any guidance on internal space standards to follow in new-build housing developments, a number of local authorities have produced space standards as part of their planning policies, in the form of Supplementary Planning Guidance or Documents providing guidelines for minimum space standards (see Appendix 1). These provide guidance on minimum standards, but cannot be imposed or enforced in planning appeals.

Croydon Council is currently in the process of drawing up a Supplement Planning Document on housing space standards, which the working party welcomes and supports. Recommended bedroom dimensions are broadly in line with supplementary guidance in a number of other London boroughs (see Appendix 1).

Some councils have attempted to insert space standards into their Unitary Development Plans (their planning policy framework) in order to equip themselves to counter applicants' appeals on grounds of insufficient size. However, all attempt at setting space standards within "Part 1" local authority planning policies have so far been opposed by the Planning Inspectorate for England.

Local Planning Authorities are having to contend with very ambitious building targets. In the Early Alterations to the London Plan 2006, the London borough of Croydon was set a ten year target of 11,000 new properties, to be built between 2007/8 and 2016/17. The Council responded to these targets, highlighting a range of concerns, including the need to meet

"...the real need for more family accommodation or the conflict between achieving more sustainable designs, high design quality and more healthy lifestyles which often requires some open space."

The Council put forward the following concerns, which are highlighted in this and various other studies on space standards:

"Even if very high densities are physically possible on these sites they might only be achieved at the detriment to residential quality, the amenity of the development and the surrounds and the infrastructure and facilities of the area."

The role of other agencies in setting regulations and guidance

The Members' working group examined what specific standards and guidance have been used in England in past decades to regulate internal space standards. Their findings show that sets of regulation and guidance have been produced by a number of different agencies since the 1940s.

Social housing

After the Second World War, the 1949 Housing Manual standards determining room sizes in new homes were superseded by the Parker Morris standards, drawn up

2

What national and local policies say about room sizes

by the Parker Morris Committee following the influential 1961 report on housing space standards in public housing. They were first used as a framework for good practice, with internal standards rising steadily through the 1960s. The standards subsequently became mandatory for all council housing from 1969 until 1980, when the Local Government, Planning and Land Act rescinded these standards as concerns mounted regarding public expenditure.

During the 1980s, as Local Authority house-building significantly declined in number, the Housing Association sector emerged to take over as the main provider of new social housing, and followed guidelines set out by the Housing Corporation in the 1983 document *Design and Contract Criteria*, which largely equated with the Parker Morris standards. However, by 1987, as the Housing Association Grant (HAG) gradually decreased, cost efficiency was rewarded by the Housing Corporation over and above adherence to housing quality criteria.

A major change in funding was brought in by the Housing Act of 1988. Under this Act, the 100% public funding system for development projects was substituted in part by loans from the private sector, adding pressure to reduce costs. Subsequent research showed that there had been an impact on housing quality.

By the early 1990s, a drop in Housing Association quality standards in England began to be identified by a number of research reports (e.g. Karn and Sheridan, 1994) which documented the steady decrease in the quality of space and amenity standards. Karn and Sheridan showed that 68% of HA properties built in 1991/1992 fell below Parker Morris standards by more than

5%. Further research showed a reduction in storage, circulation space, amenities and even standards of construction materials and workmanship (Bownon, 1992, quoted in Goodchild, 1997).

Housing Corporation Regulations

In this climate, the Housing Corporation set out to reverse the deterioration of quality standards by developing its Scheme Development Standards (SDS), the first edition of which appeared in 1993. The SDS core performance standards defined the minimum that was expected in a housing development funded through the Housing Corporation's Social Housing Grant (SHG), and provided detailed criteria relating to the size of rooms, without actually specifying particular room sizes, e.g. criterion 1.21.29, "*Can beds in all bedrooms be accommodated in more than one position?*".

These standards have now been updated to take into consideration changes to Building Regulations that had taken place since 2003 and the advent of the Code for Sustainable Homes in 2006, and have been relaunched as the Housing Corporation's 'Design and Quality Standards' (D&QS).

Performance on the core standards is rated using the Housing Quality Indicator (HQI) system, which is a measurement and assessment tool designed to allow housing schemes to be evaluated on the basis of quality rather than simply of cost. Version 4 of the HQIs have brought them in line with the latest Design and Quality Standard.

The HQI assesses the quality of a housing project using a range of categories, which are subdivided into Indicators. An HQI assessment generates a score for each

Indicator, a profile of the scheme, and an overall HQI score. Indicator 5 (Unit size) and indicator 6 (Unit layout) provide detailed information on room sizes and average sizes of required furniture in each room. As regards core standards relating to the internal environment, the Housing Corporation stipulates that it should be:

“comfortable, convenient, capable of sensibly accommodating the necessary furniture and equipment associated with specific room activities and be suitable for the particular needs of intended user groups”.

Core standards have been drawn up mainly with new-build general needs housing provision in mind, as this is by far the most important category of housing funded by the Housing Corporation, and are mandatory for this category of housing. However, they will also apply in part to low-cost home ownership: compliance with internal and external environment aspects of the general needs core standards will avoid adverse “value-for-money” assessments by the Corporation when considering funding or other support. The Design and Quality Standards therefore emphasise that it is in the interest of affordable housing providers to ensure that the standard of provision for Low Cost Home Ownership does not fall below that of equivalent homes for rent.

New developments will be expected to meet or exceed the minimum scores for three aspects of the published Housing Quality Indicators (HQIs) for unit size, unit layout as well as services, which fall outside the remit of this study. It is worth noting that internal and external storage provision is to be subject to particular scrutiny as it has constituted a common cause of concern

identified on the Corporation’s previous Impact Assessment visits.

The D&QS Core Standards are further reinforced by a number of recommendations. On the internal environment, they include the following:

- Ensure that low-cost home ownership design sizes are at least equivalent to rental provision
- Ensure that internal external storage space provision for all homes exceeds the HQI unit layout requirement for the designed occupancy
- In homes designed for families, ensure that there is an area where homework studies may be undertaken in private, away from other family activities

In addition to the above-mentioned core standards, the D&QS emphasize that additional design and management considerations will have to be addressed to ensure successful high density family provision.



2

What national and local policies say about room sizes

How Design & Quality Standards fit in with other regulations

Designing new social housing now has to take into consideration three sets of requirements:

- Part M of the Building Regulations - Access to and use of domestic and non-domestic buildings (in force since October 1999)
- Design and Quality Standards (in force since April 2007)
- Lifetime Homes standards (developed in 1991, not yet mandatory)

All three sets of requirements share many similarities, with Part M of the Building Regulations making the least demands on builders, and Design and Quality Standards requiring the highest standards, and making explicit demands regarding internal space standards - unlike Lifetime Homes standards.

Croydon Council and the Councils which form part of the South-West London Partnership work to an Investment Framework, which sets out the funding priorities for the seven boroughs within it¹. These principles apply to the provision of new affordable housing through the Housing Corporation's National Affordable Housing Programme, through Section 106 Agreements and through local authorities' own direct funding. The Investment Framework stipulates that all homes which are to be built within these boroughs should comply with Lifetime Homes standards in line with the *London Plan* expectation, and that the overall sub-regional programme should achieve 10% wheelchair standard.

The Council is also keen to increase its own affordable housing stock, and is setting up of a Housing Special Purpose Vehicle to enable access to mainstream funding for this. This is in line with proposals for the setting up of Local Housing Companies as set out in the Government's Green Paper on Homes for the Future published in July 2007. It is to be hoped that social housing to be funded and built through these mechanisms will apply the principles set out in the Housing Corporation's Housing Quality Indicators as well as Lifetime Homes standards.

Overall, in addition to incorporating Lifetime Homes standards into their framework, Design and Quality Standards set out relatively generous space standards. This may be seen in Appendix 1 which compares various different sets of regulations and guidance on space standards, and through an examination of the furniture sizes used by various agencies to assess the internal space standards of new building projects.

For instance, the National House-Building Council (NHBC), which sets standards for the private house-building industry, used to recommend that a single bedroom should have space for a bed, a bedside table, a chest of drawers and a wardrobe. The Housing Corporation adds a table (0.50m by 1.05m) and a chair to the NHBC's list. The NHBC used to define the "standard size" of a single bed as 0.75m by 1.9m, while the Housing Corporation's Housing Quality Indicators sets this as 0.90m by 2.00m. Standards in countries such as Germany and Sweden are even more generous (1m by 2m for Germany, and 0.90m by 2.10 for Sweden).

¹Croydon, Kingston, Lambeth, Merton, Richmond, Sutton, Wandsworth

The private house-building industry

Building in the private sector has been controlled by the Building Regulations and the National House-Builders' Registration Council's standards, which impose a far less restricted framework than the field of social housing. This has led to widespread dissatisfaction among customers. A survey of purchasers in 1968 revealed major dissatisfaction with a range of inadequacies e.g. heating provision and lack of storage space.

In the early 1980s the NHBC introduced new criteria for storage space in kitchens and elsewhere in dwellings and minimum bedrooms size for housing which received NHBC warranty. A key criterion of these quality criteria was the minimum size of a double bedroom, namely, 9 square metres: bedrooms measuring less than 9 square metres were described as 'one-bed spaces' and bedrooms measuring over 9 square metres were described as two-bed spaces (as long as all walls were no less than 2.7 metres wide).



Despite the existence of these standards, the private house-building industry was criticised about the small floor-space of the "starter home" properties which proliferated in the early 1980s. Difficulties arose at the point of resale, when owners found out that their homes were difficult to sell, and had significantly depreciated in value. The most extreme of these homes proved to have a very short market life and builders soon abandoned them for more conventional designs.

The NHBC space standards were discontinued after a few years, as it was felt that this matter was more appropriately left to market forces.

The Building for Life standard

Every year, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and its partners (Civic Trust, Design for Homes, English Partnerships, the Home Builders Federation and the Housing Corporation) present awards for the best new housing developments, according to the criteria of the Building for Life standard. One of the criteria used to evaluate designs clearly addresses space standards:

"Do internal spaces and layout allow for adaption, conversion or extension?"

However, while such awards can encourage the best developers to strive for better standards, it will be difficult to achieve wide adherence to generous space standards if government regulation does not stipulate or allow enforcement of such a standard.

3

Other factors impacting on room size standards

The position of the prospective buyer or tenant

Apart from the regulatory framework, this investigation sought to ascertain whether there exist other pressures which may compel individuals to accept cramped housing conditions. The house-hunting customer him/herself is under considerable pressure to compromise on lower standards than desired for a number of reasons, set out below.

Greater London still suffers from a housing shortage despite the building that has taken place in recent years, as a result of its recent population growth, with which the building industry has not kept pace. Figures for 2006 show that there were around 150,000 households considered as overcrowded (GLA figures). In the private rented sector, estate agents state that they have very low numbers of properties to offer customers coming through their doors despite the growth of the buy-to-let market between 1997 and 2007.



The housing shortage in London keeps prices up, whether one is renting or buying a property - while house, and particularly flat prices have plummeted in 2008 in other parts of the country, they have remained relatively stable in London after a rise of 226% in ten years, compared to 177% in the rest of the country (Source: Halifax Bank). As a result, the choice of property available whether for rental or for purchase is relatively low, and reduced further by personal budgets which often fail to match rental or purchase prices.

Until mid-2007, many individuals sought to get on the bottom rung of the home-ownership ladder at any cost, encouraged by very generous mortgage offers: prospective home-owners could obtain mortgages for the whole value of the property, or 125% of their income, and the buy-to-let market offered mortgages at 85%, sometimes 90% of the value of the property.

Where prospective buyers do have a certain amount of choice in what type of property they can acquire, the Heriot-Watt study mentioned above found that, although they prefer spacious accommodation, they will opt for properties with as high a number of bedrooms as possible, size notwithstanding, on the understanding that the number of bedrooms, not their surface area, is a key driver of house prices. This is borne out by the housing market: a two bedroom property is approximately 16% cheaper than a comparable property with one more bedroom.

Most people do not move house very often, because of the stress and costs associated with a house move, whether one is buying or renting. A house purchase

involves legal fees, stamp duty, and various other miscellaneous costs. Rental often involves a large deposit the return of which is not guaranteed, as well as estate agents' fees. As a result of the relative infrequency of moves, the customer will also be less experienced than the one buying a mobile phone or a pair of shoes (of which there will be a far greater choice) and less able to exert influence over the housing market.

Developers and house builders

The current climate and literature available on house-building both suggest that :

- House-builders have a captive market as a result of the long-term housing shortage in the capital
- Developers and builders are motivated by the need to maximise their profits in view of the high cost of land in London, thus building as many housing units as possible on a piece of land
- Little feedback is provided to developers and builders regarding the perceived quality of their developments and the long term impact of these on their occupants, as neither developers nor builders are rewarded for good design, or penalised for the long-term negative impacts of their developments.
- In addition, “cut-throat” competition in the industry was quoted by builders themselves as a negative influence on quality, in research carried out in Scotland (Gibbs et al (1995) but likely to have echoes further south.

Responses on recent consultation regarding Croydon's proposed Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Housing

Space Standards included the following comments from representatives of the building industry:

- Concerns regarding reduced profits for the building industry if internal space standards are increased
- the assertion that fierce competition for land is driving up costs for developers and limiting their opportunity to build larger
- Concerns about the lack of an even playing field among developers, and about the possibility of seeing roomier housing proposals losing out to cheaper ones
- The assertion that new SPD on minimum room sizes might restrict innovation
- The comment that room sizes are “*issues which primarily concern the already comfortably off.*”

In the light of the last remark, it is perhaps ironic that the Housing Corporation should have particularly generous internal space standards at present, and that the few Housing Association properties visited by the working group should have been roomier than those available for sale.

It is important that there should be better links between the agencies that build properties and those who occupy, manage or maintain those properties, so that builders can cater for the basic needs of families, and so that new homes can be valued and used for several decades to come, thus making sustainable use of finances as well as buildings.

3

Other factors impacting on room size standards

To summarise...

There exist no national policies on internal space standards, and any endeavours by local councils to include space standards within their Unitary Development Plan or Local Development Framework have been overruled by the Planning Inspectorate, thus providing the house-building industry the initiative in setting space standards during a house-buying rush. Who will want to occupy these properties when the market settles or stalls?

The NHBC endeavoured to set standards for the private house-building industry in the 1980s, but abandoned them in the 1990s, leaving the issue to be shaped by market forces.

As regards social housing, standards have fluctuated, with periods of low standards in 1980s. However, the development of Scheme Development Standards And Design & Quality Standards has shown the Corporation's commitment to provision of reasonably sized property for rental and low-cost home ownership.

"Size matters", the study by the London Assembly's Planning and Spatial Development Committee, acknowledges the need to establish adequate internal standards, and the fact that *"the lack of family sized housing will mean that many people are living in overcrowded conditions, with detrimental impacts on family relationships, child development and health"*. In contrast to the Planning Inspectorate's current position, it recommends that:

"Borough planning departments should include size and mix policies, based on their housing needs assessment to calculate the required mix of units in their area, and

set out these requirements in their Unitary Development Plan / Local Development Framework and development briefs for larger sites or where appropriate".

"When boroughs only use unit measurements to calculate the amount of affordable housing, consideration should be given to including habitable rooms or floor space as an alternative or complementary measure to secure the required housing mix".

However, the priorities of national government policy, current developers and builders and the circumstances of prospective residents do not provide promising prospects for establishing adequate internal space standards for new housing. Because of the severe housing shortage in the south-east of England and London in particular, even very small properties are taken up (either by home owners or private tenants). Quantity is likely to be prioritised at the expense of quality and the human consequences of poor housing design, unless legislation and its enforcement restore a better balance.



4

Room sizes in new-build properties

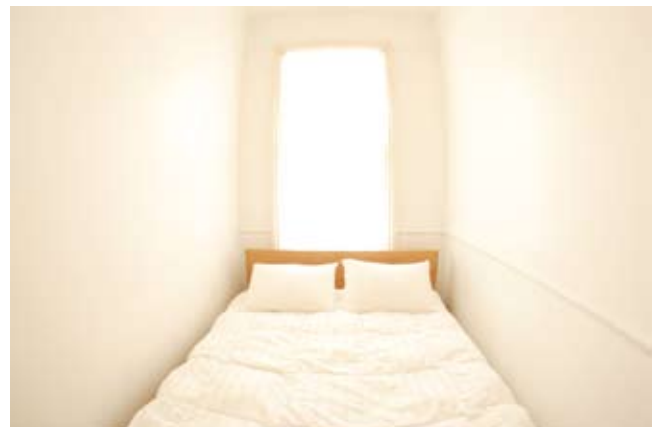
The previous section has outlined the production of policies, regulations and guidance relating to internal space standards. This section will focus on examining data regarding room sizes in new housing developments, and drawing conclusions regarding the size and quality of their layout.

Two studies provide an indication of trends in room sizes in the 1990s and thereafter.

A study by Karn and Sheridan ('New Homes in the 1990s - A Study of Design, Space and Amenity in Housing Association and Private Sector Production', 1994), based on data collected from two planning authorities, provided an analysis of room size data based on the NHBC's former guideline recommending a minimum size of 9 square metres for a double bedroom or a "two bed space", and a label of "one bed space" or single bedroom when the surface area is below that figure (see page 14). Karn and Sheridan argued that the low number of homes containing two bedrooms with four bed spaces (22% in the Housing Association sector and 6% in the private sector in their study) represents a worrying trend. They argued that these properties would be very cramped unless occupied by two adults and one child.

More recent research by a team at Heriot-Watt University for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the Glasgow and Edinburgh areas ('Why do people buy new-build housing?' - 2004). found that bedrooms in new properties surveyed were smaller still than in the study conducted by Karn and Sheridan.

The table on the following page suggests that room sizes shrank between 1994 and 2004 by showing the falling provision of bed spaces - using the above-mentioned minimum standard of 9 square metres for a room with 2 bed spaces. While only 7.9% of one-bedroom properties in the 1994 study had a bedroom with only 1 bed space, the provision of such small bedrooms grew to 19.7% of new homes in the 2004 study. In two-bedroom properties, while the 1994 study recorded no new homes at all with 2 single ("1 bed space") bedrooms, the percentage grew to 13% in the 2004 study. Looking at all the different sizes of new properties on the market, the 2004 study highlights a growing proportion of homes with very small bedrooms (marked with an asterisk in the table).





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Room sizes in new-build properties

Property and Room Sizes	Karn and Sheridan Study (1994)	Heriot-Watt Study (2004)
1 BEDROOM		
1 bed space	7.9%	19.7%*
2 bed spaces	92.1%	80.3%
2 BEDROOMS		
2 bed spaces	0.0%	13.0%*
3 bed spaces	84.0%	58.1%
4 bed spaces	16.0%	28.9%
3 BEDROOMS		
3 bed spaces	0.0%	4.5%*
4 bed spaces	53.0%	58.9%
5 bed spaces	44.6%	30.3%
6 bed spaces	2.4%	6.3%
4 BEDROOMS		
4 bed spaces	0.0%	2.7%*
5 bed spaces	8.0%	18.2%
6 bed spaces	52.0%	52.7%
7 bed spaces	28.0%	6.2%
8 bed spaces	12.0%	10.1%

Comparison of properties built in 1994 and 2004, classified by the number of bed spaces available. (Source: Preferences, quality and choice in new-build housing, 2004), showing an increased percentage of new homes with very limited bed spaces in 2004.

In the majority of properties in the Heriot-Watt sample, while the first bedroom is over 9 square metres in surface area, the *additional bedrooms* regularly measure less than this. For example, 58.9% of three bedroom properties had four bed spaces, so in these cases only the “main bedroom” was larger than 9m², while the two additional bedrooms measured less than this. For four-bedroom houses, only 10.1% had four bedrooms measure at least 9 m² each. The mean size in the Heriot-Watt sample was 11.1m² for the first bedroom, 8.7m² for a second bedroom, and 7.2 m² for 3rd bedrooms, with 26% of 3rd bedrooms being smaller than 6m².

These figures suggest a significant reduction in space standards, particularly since Karn and Sheridan (1994) oversampled at the bottom end of the market (as did our study) while the sample under consideration in the Heriot-Watt study was intended to be more representative of the market as a whole.

Customer surveys testify to house-buyers’ dissatisfaction. The Joseph Rowntree study on ‘Preferences, quality and choice in new-build housing’ (2004) echoes customers’ dissatisfaction, stating that...

“house-building outcomes are very different from people’s needs and preferences”, and that...

“the trend of buyers receiving an ever-increasing number of ever-smaller bedrooms in new-build housing has continued since the work of Karn and Sheridan (1994), (...showing) dissatisfaction among new-build house-buyers and prospective buyers”.

In addition, some of the participants in the Heriot-Watt study felt that they had been misled about room sizes. Many, especially those who purchased lower-cost properties,

pointed out that the show home used very small furniture to give the impression of more spacious rooms. Many participants did not notice this until they moved in. Some were forced to acquire smaller furniture to fit it into their new homes.



Visits to new-build properties in Croydon

This study included exploration of room sizes in new properties through property sales websites, as well as through visits to new housing developments.

Members focused mainly on the lower end of the home-ownership sector, where lower prices tend to put particular pressure on internal space standards. Addresses of new developments were obtained from Croydon’s Planning and Transportation Department and from the “Right Move” property website. Visits were conducted to new-build two bedroom properties which families might consider purchasing, at a number of different locations in Croydon and South London.

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Room sizes in new-build properties

Details of room sizes in properties examined are set out in Appendix 2.

A key pattern repeated throughout the developments visited was the widespread use of **open-plan layouts**, sometimes combining living and eating areas, at other times, including a kitchen corner in the open plan area. During one visit, the accompanying estate agent estimated that 80% or so of flats being built had an open plan layout which included a kitchen area.

The cooking area was generally equipped with a good supply of “white goods”, including extractor fans. The reception area was usually furnished with a sofa, armchairs and coffee table, small dining table and chairs, but with a very limited (and small) supply of storage furniture such as bookcases. Where the shape of the room was rather “square” than “long” or L-shaped, there was little scope for arranging clearly set out “eating” and “living” areas, or an area for children to do homework away from other activities in the room. In some cases, the rooms were “triangular” and somewhat narrow, leaving very little room for adapting the layout of the furniture (see picture).

Bedrooms were small. In 51.8% of properties in appendix 2, one of the two bedrooms were under the NHBC standard of 9m² for a double room. Of these, 21% - about a fifth - measured less than 7 m². In a number of cases, measurements provided were misleading, as only wider spaces are quoted in either triangular or L-shaped rooms, not the narrower areas. In one property, the second bedroom measured 1.65m (5’5’) along the narrowest wall, which was occupied by a bed - which will soon be outgrown by any child occupying the room. Setting out the furniture along the longer

wall, however, would have left no room for cupboards or a desk.

The provision of **storage space** varied considerably from development to development. The most generous development provided dedicated storage space in the hall (about 1m²), and in each bedroom. Another provided dedicated storage space in the hall, but two provided no storage whatsoever, leaving future occupiers to squeeze wardrobes and shelves into very restricted spaces, the pattern being “the smaller the sizes, the less generous the provision of storage space”.

In a number of the properties visited, the following will be difficult to achieve:

- fitting two teenage children comfortably in the 2nd bedrooms, a widespread need in Croydon, with an average birth rate of 1.8 children per household
- providing a quiet environment without any distractions for children to do their homework in



- cooking and eating meals from fresh ingredients without causing long-term damage to the furniture and fittings in the living room
- storing clothes, hi-fi, television, PC, books, and other possessions without cramping space considerably.

The properties would provide adequate facilities for a couple with one young child, but would not cater for the needs of two teenagers needing space for study and quiet recreation.

Housing Association developments in Croydon

Information was obtained regarding room sizes in two recent Housing Association developments in Croydon, which give a flavour of the types of room sizes favoured by the Housing Corporation.

A development of 21 flats and 15 houses in the Ashburton Village for the London and Quadrant H.A. was completed in December 2007. It offers double bedrooms ranging from 10.72m² to 15.03m², and single bedrooms - clearly categorised as such - ranging from 7.14m² to 8.18m². Only in one property out of the 36 is there a very small room (area: 5.46m²), which could only be used either as an office or a room for a nursery.

A development of 18 rented units and 22 shared ownership units for Servite H.A. in Lower Addiscombe Road, completed in February 2008, has the following range of room sizes:

- The double bedrooms range 10.5m² to 14.3m²
- 3 and 4 bed properties have 1 bedroom measuring 7 or 7.2m²
- Family accommodation separates kitchen and communal eating and relaxing areas into two rooms. Only the one-bedroom flats combine kitchen, living room and dining room functions into one room

Compensating for small room sizes

While adequate room sizes are an important consideration for the prospective occupants of a property, other housing conditions also have a role to play, and need to be taken into consideration in view of the high cost of land and property in the London area.

Sound insulation

Effective sound insulation is critical to privacy, and can ensure that other occupants' activities encroach as little as possible on a resident's private activities. Sound insulation was quoted as being a particularly common factor affecting resident well-being by stakeholders consulted as part of the Housing Space Standards and Capital Gains studies (see page 8). It is also bound to minimise tensions within households as the noise of their activities impacts adversely on others.

It was very difficult to assess the effectiveness of sound insulation during any visits as properties were vacant and surroundings were relatively quiet during visits.

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Room sizes in new-build properties

Good quality open space

This was much valued by both residents interviewed in the Capital Gains study and officers interviewed as part of the Housing Space Standards investigation. The latter includes recommendations for external recreational space, and the Capital Gains study stipulates that adequate amenities for play must be provided for children of all ages. Indeed, PPS3 (see page 10) acknowledges the importance of “good provision of recreational areas, including private gardens, play areas and informal play space” “to ensure that the needs of children are taken into account”. However, it only stipulates the provision of **outdoor spaces** to this end. This provision is unsatisfactory in a country with a cool and humid climate and dark winter evenings.

The quality of green spaces visited during this study varied considerably from development to development. While efforts had been made to provide shrubbery and lawns in all, the smaller developments in particular did not have extensive enough green spaces to offer either “privacy”, as specified in the Code for Sustainable Homes, or space for children to run around.



Lighting

Lighting affects people’s body rhythms, sleep patterns, alertness and moods. It is one of the 29 hazards used to assess the suitability of a dwelling under the new Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), which was introduced with the Housing Act 2004.

On the positive side, good lighting with views of nature can perhaps mitigate the effect of living in a confined space. A paper written by Kelly M. J. Farley and Jennifer A. Veitch (‘A Room with a view: a review of the effects of windows on work and well-being’ - August 2001) provides a detailed review of literature on the effects of windows on work and well-being, and observes that the most consistent finding in the literature was that people prefer natural rather than built or urban views from windows. Windows with views of nature were found to enhance work and well-being in a number of ways including increasing job satisfaction, interest value of the job, perceptions of self-productivity, perceptions of physical working conditions, life satisfaction, and decreasing intention to quit. They have also been found to shorten the recovery time of surgical patients and decrease their need for medication.

On their visits, Members also commented on the effectiveness of light in adding amenity to otherwise small properties, through lightly coloured interior walls and generously-proportioned windows with views onto pleasant grounds. Provision was most generous in reception rooms, many of which were fitted with French windows. Lighting in bedrooms was not as generous and windows were considerably smaller. In one case, the only source of light was a skylight.

Mobility and adaptability of design

These principles are enshrined in Lifetime Homes principles and the Building for Life standard, although they are often overlooked in practice.

As a result of the growing trend in designing open plan, combined kitchen / living room / dining room premises in affordable housing, bedrooms increasingly need to be used for private study and recreation, and need to be designed to provide enough space for not only a bed, but a desk and adequate storage space for the occupant's various belongings. Where space is at a premium, this can be mitigated with floor plans which allow families to adapt their furniture layout to changing circumstances and avoid a further house move. However, bedrooms in appendix 2 which measure less than 9m² will be very hard to adapt for two growing children, as mentioned on page 22.



Effective housing management

The Capital Gains study observed that the popularity of the high density housing estates was due in large part to the good maintenance of the grounds, good access to housing staff to report and resolve problems, and effective estate agreements and community involvement. The study also reported that when housing density increases, management costs, rents and service charges tend to go up. Thus initial purchase costs may be offset by later costs. However, management on many private estates is often kept to a minimum, which can easily lead to the deterioration of communal areas and to the attractiveness of the area, and to dissatisfaction or loss of interest and commitment to the development among local residents. Indeed, while all developers and their customers do have to face up to very high land costs in the London area, good design and high specifications e.g. effective sound isolation, communal grounds, etc. **also have a cost.** Any initial savings on land costs or through economies of scale may therefore be lost, and further expenditure may follow, to secure the appropriate level of local management and services, and possibly to address any problems that may arise from living in high-density developments, e.g. pressures on environmental services, and the involvement of local agencies in addressing problems such as anti-social behaviour, the consequences of family break-up, etc.

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Negative impacts of insufficient room sizes

Visits were carried out to attractive-looking new homes with a generous provision of fixtures and fittings. However, concerns were expressed regarding the long-term effects of housing a family with two growing children (the average Croydon family has 1.8 children according to the 2001 census) and their belongings.

Education

The amalgamation of three different types of activity (cooking, eating, relaxing) into one room may affect the quality of all these activities. As regards cooking, the likelihood of damage to fabrics in the “living room area” and the difficulty of cleaning these surfaces may discourage cooking and involving children in preparing family meals. The very small eating areas do not make for comfortable dining. This could play a role in discouraging regular meals. Thus the inappropriateness of both preparation and eating areas may inhibit families’ ability to practise their cooking skills, get into the

habit of eating regular meals comprising freshly cooked ingredients, and transmit nutritional knowledge and skills to children as they grow up, thus increasing likely dependence on poor quality and costly take-away foods.

As for relaxing, it may be difficult to concentrate on any activity other than the loudest one in the room - often the television. This may have implications for children’s education as they and their parents are provided with insufficient space for quiet reading or study.

It needs to be noted that little research has been carried out in the UK to examine the relationship between overcrowding and educational attainment. Some policy-oriented studies have pointed to the difficulty of completing homework in overcrowded homes. In addition, a Joseph Rowntree Foundation study on ‘Tackling low educational achievement’ (R. Cassen and G. Kingdon - June 2007) acknowledges that *“low achievement may begin in the home”* and that *“everything which improves the home learning environment has as part to play in reducing later low achievement”*.

Abroad, research carried out in France (Goux and Maurin - 2003) found that financial assistance for poor families did not have much effect on the children’s educational attainment unless it was specifically targeted at improving their housing or their access to medical care. Goux and Maurin’s research identified two clear effects which impact on the performance of children at school:

- An excess of interactions, stimulations and demands from people living in the children’s immediate area



- A lack of intimacy, making it more difficult for them to have the necessary amount of quiet time needed for personal development

Using a sample of 15 year olds, Goux and Maurin also showed that 60% of those living in overcrowded conditions had been held back a grade in primary or middle school. Despite the lack of research on the impact of poor housing on educational achievement, a number of agencies acknowledge the need for sufficient space to be made available for children to be able to spend time on quiet study, such as the following:

- ‘Space to wind down’, a document produced by the London Borough of Islington, recognises that overcrowding *“adversely affects children’s development and educational attainment as it makes it difficult for children to concentrate on tasks such as studying and doing their homework”*.
- ‘Crowded house’ (2004), the Shelter report on cramped living in English housing, acknowledges that this need becomes even more acute for those sitting GCSEs or A levels.
- A publication by Jerold L Axelrod, ‘Architectural plans for adding on or remodelling’ (1992), highlights the changing needs of the family, which should be recognised and enshrined in guidance such as Lifetime Homes:

“As children come into the family, there is a need for bedroom space. As they grow older, there is a need for adequate play or study space”.

The Housing Corporation too acknowledges the need for a quiet area for children’s studies. In its Design and Quality Standards

(D&QS), it stipulates the furniture required in a bedroom as well as its minimum size. In addition, it recommends that *“in homes designed for families, ensure that there is an area where homework studies may be undertaken in private, away from other family activities”*.

A bedroom measuring 7 or 8 square metres as in many of the properties visited, and equipped with the furniture stipulated in the Housing Corporation’s HQI, will be very cramped if occupied by two children, leaving very little space for movement, for playing or for privacy. Indeed, the Housing Corporation’s minimum requirements only include space for one table, thus making studying and writing difficult for one of the occupants if the room is shared. As regards the needs of wheelchair users, replacing the bed-making spaces of 0.80m² with a turning circle with a diameter of 1.50m² (area: 1.77m²) would bring the minimum surface area needed to a higher figure than many bedrooms visited.



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Negative impacts of insufficient room sizes

	Length	Width	Quantity	Area in m ²
2 single beds	2.00	0.90	2	3.60
2 bedside tables	0.40	0.40	2	0.32
1 chest of drawers	0.45	0.75	1	0.34
table	1.05	0.50	1	0.53
double wardrobe	0.60	1.20	1	0.72
bed making space	2.00	0.40	1	0.80
TOTAL				6.30

Space allocated for twin bedroom furniture as stipulated in the Housing Corporation Housing Quality Indicators (HQI)

Well-being

“Well-being” may be an intangible concept, related to ideas such as comfort and happiness, which may seem to be luxuries. However, lack of well-being in a household can lead to conflicts between its members, undermining relationships as all members fight for the space and the right to carry out their daily activities, and struggle to get away from the noises of other members’ activities. This in turn can lead to relationship breakdown, in some cases homelessness for members of the family who leave home, or to avoidable house moves which put a strain on the family and tend to leave an environmental trail in the neighbourhood.

RELATE, the organisation which provides counselling and support to rebuild damaged relationships, are very aware that poor housing is a major cause of relationship breakdown, and consequent homelessness. Their perceptions support the assertion that

“homelessness is the result of relationship breakdown in over 50% of cases” (Crisis, 2003). Relate’s expertise is being used by homelessness units in at least 14 Local Authorities around the country to alleviate relationship problems that might otherwise lead to homelessness.

‘Full House?’, the Shelter report on how overcrowding affects families, provides comprehensive information on how overcrowding affects families: 77% of respondents to the survey conducted as part of this study strongly agreed that overcrowding had a negative effect on family relationships. For respondents, the five effects of overcrowding with the highest level of strong agreement were as follows:

- “little privacy in our home” - 92% of responses
- Depression, anxiety or stress - 86% of responses

- Not enough room for children to play - 84%
- Children argue and fight - 81%
- Sleep disturbance - 75%

Quotes from respondents are evocative of the stress they experience in cramped conditions:

“The result of my overcrowding is the children always fighting over possessions and space”

The Shelter Report reported on the housing conditions of families with very little option to find better accommodation, mainly because they found that large affordable properties were in very short supply (72% of respondents). The pressures on families which can afford to buy a home are usually far lower, as families have more choices available to them. However, the increasing demand for space required by growing teenagers can also have an impact, as echoed in this quote from the above-mentioned Heriot-Watt study (see p. 6):

“The bedroom sizes for us were alright but downstairs I find, we had 3 small children and this seemed okay but in the meantime they have grown and it is like Piccadilly Circus most of the time when they are back”. (Heriot-Watt study).

The stakeholders consulted as part of the study on Housing Space Standards (see page 6) also echoed the above findings, and believed that there was a link between small room sizes and well-being and health. The need to “get away from one another” was seen as significant, and the admission that there was little research data in this field was countered by the strong perception that

new housing developments provided little room for privacy, exacerbating the incidence of anti-social behaviour, and encouraging children to get out of the house to avoid conflicts within it.

As children grow up, it is important to provide them with a space of their own to find privacy, quietness and the opportunity to study. Children need to feel comfortable in their homes to flourish and relate positively with siblings and parents. If teenagers are not given this opportunity, a possible alternative is for them to seek an environment they can call their own outside the home, away from traditional providers of physical well-being, emotional support, and discipline, where they may feel the respect, status and sense of belonging which the home environment may not be able to provide.

Link to anti-social behaviour

There is significant evidence that cramped housing may perpetrate trends of poor behaviour among children.

‘Space to wind down’, the study on overcrowding conducted for the London Borough of Islington, states that overcrowding can be a potential driver for anti social behaviour and youth crime when combined with a with a lack of suitable space outside.

A study* commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on ways of preventing crime and antisocial behaviour young people aged 8–13 at high risk of offending and antisocial behaviour, reported that a substantial majority of families interviewed mentioned living arrangements, specifically overcrowding. The majority of

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Negative impacts of insufficient room sizes

parents interviewed in connection with the study were concerned about their children's attitudes and behaviour at home, as they were apt to be disruptive, aggressive, abusive and generally disobedient. The study acknowledged the role of poor housing conditions in increasing the risk factors for children, and acknowledged that any improvements could substantially improve family wellbeing.

Ill-health

Another well documented effect of overcrowding is physical ill-health, with strong links between overcrowding and specific health conditions in both children and adults, including respiratory conditions, meningitis and helicobacter pylori, which is a cause of stomach ulcers. Overcrowding can also lead to disturbed sleep patterns among people having to share a bedroom, and worsen existing health problems. Moreover, disorder in the home due to the lack of storage space increases the risk of accidents, particularly among children aged 4 and below, and children from poorer backgrounds:

***Youth Inclusion and Support Panels: Preventing Crime and Antisocial Behaviour' - 2007 (Newcastle Centre for Family Studies, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne)*

"The children are fighting constantly and they are always falling over things" ('Full House?').

"It is quite dangerous as young children are very energetic and tend to run about and

accidents do happen." (Comment by resident in overcrowded accommodation in Islington, from this London borough's strategy for reducing overcrowding, 'Space to Wind Down')

Such problems will be particularly acute in households which have not got the financial means or the welfare support to move into more spacious and suitable accommodation, e.g. households which can only afford the rent for private rented accommodation which is too small for their needs. Some very small new-build buy-to-let properties may present future occupants with such risks.

Possible consequences of cramped housing conditions for home-owners

The types of problems faced by a family reliant on privately rented accommodation (and possibly welfare benefits) and those of a household which has the financial means to buy a home, albeit a very small one, are different.

However, the overcrowding experienced by home owners may well lead to some of the problems set out above, and undermine family well-being and educational achievement. In addition, it may lead such families to move house as soon as they have the means to do so, thus bringing about a higher turnover in the community and the disadvantages this entails.

Consequences might include:

- reduced interest in the physical fabric of a home one is hoping to leave in the short or medium term
- lack of commitment and involvement in the community
- rubbish and fly-tipping associated with frequent house-moves

Impact of cramped housing on the rented sector

a) Private tenancies

Many new-build flats have been purchased by individuals as an investment, as real estate is seen as a more reliable long-term investment for old age than the pension packages available either from one's employer or the private pension market. In addition, many councils are making pro-active use of the private rented sector to provide accommodation to their housing applicants.

The proliferation of flats with very small second bedrooms may impact on choices available to private tenants, particularly on individuals who are reliant on Local Housing Allowance (LHA - housing benefit for the private rented sector).

The choices open to tenants in receipt of LHA will be particularly limited, as their benefit entitlement stipulates the number of bedrooms they require, but not the size of rooms they are entitled to. The rules allow for a bedroom for any two children of the same sex aged under 16 - thus, in many cases, forcing two children coming up to GCSE exam age into one very cramped room.

This benefit entitlement may undermine their ability to secure adequately sized accommodation. The building of large quantities of new flats with very small bedrooms is likely to impact on rent levels and the standard amount of LHA tenants will be entitled to. LHA is set on a yearly basis at or below the **median rent levels** in the area for the relevant type of property (i.e. the middle value out of all the rents charged in

the area: 50% of rents are above the median figure, and 50% of rents are below the median), and will make it difficult for families in receipt of LHA to find affordable and spacious accommodation for their children, as the cheaper end of the rental market will in all likelihood correlate with smaller room sizes.

In a worst case scenario, the unpopularity of very small properties in a given area may give rise to a high resident turnover and a large number of empty properties in the area.

b) Housing Association tenancies

While the Housing Corporation does have generous internal space standards (see pages 12-13), it also makes use of property with smaller room sizes as temporary accommodation. For instance, it is currently accessing and renting property which developers are finding difficult to sell on the open market, in view of the marked recent downturn in the housing market..

To conclude, while regulation currently seeks to protect social housing from extremes in poor quality house-building, the lack of regulation in the private house-building market actually affects all types of tenure.

Long-term impacts of small room sizes and high densities

As the Council is faced with ambitious government targets for new housing, it is particularly important that developers should build to high specifications. Attractive and adaptable housing can then achieve long periods of occupancy and stable communities, minimise a wide range of problems in future, ensure that popular



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Negative impacts of insufficient room sizes

housing encourages inward investment, thus enabling developments to stand the test of time.

One may cite examples in the past. Much of the housing built immediately after the 2nd World War was of a fairly high quality with spacious rooms - a courageous decision in view of the urgent need for housing at the time - and is still well used and valued.

On the other hand, a number of homes from the 60s and 70s whose unpopularity led to high turnovers of occupancy and numbers of empty properties and whose design contributed to the rise of anti-social behaviour, are now being knocked down. Problems were not necessarily linked to room sizes, but very small dwellings could suffer the same consequences of widespread unpopularity in view of their negative effects on family well-being.

The CABE publication 'The Cost of Bad Design' (2006) quotes examples of the cost of poor design. They include the case of the Holly Street estate in Hackney, built between 1971 and 1975. The system of construction was actively encouraged by the government funding regime, which also required buildings to have a 60 year design life. As its **attractiveness** declined, it became increasingly hard to let and the problems of local tenants increased. Just before it was redeveloped 20 years later, 31% of tenants were unemployed, 21% were lone parents and 63% were on housing benefits. Residents were aware that their efforts to seek employment were met with discrimination on account of their postcode, and felt that they were being written off because of external perceptions of their estate. Some 80% had applied to leave the

estate. Crime and drug abuse were rife. The poor design of the estate led to a spiralling accumulation of problems as homes were increasingly occupied by residents who lacked the skills and resources to move elsewhere or to improve their area.

The area was redeveloped in 1996, only 20 or so years afterwards, at a cost of £92 million. A survey of tenants conducted shortly after redevelopment sought their perceptions of their new homes compared with the estate before it was rebuilt. It found that:

- residents perceiving Holly Street to be dangerous fell from 60% to 5%
- residents who had witnessed a crime fell from 43% to 1%
- residents seeing graffiti or vandalism fell from 78% to 9%
- demand for NHS services fell by 33%
- calls to the police fell by more than 33%

We are now dealing with another period of significant house-building. Local communities will thrive or be undermined for decades to come by the quality of these new developments.

The availability of good quality, spacious, adaptable and affordable housing will have an important impact on ease of job recruitment and long-term inward investment, and may minimise the appearance of long-term problems associated with physical and mental health problems, low educational attainment and anti-social behaviour. Good quality housing may therefore also save the council and council tax payers money in the long run, whereas uncomfortable, unpopular housing is likely to attract a range of problems as it

becomes occupied by residents with limited housing options and life chances and little commitment to the fabric of the estate.

In addition, questions need to be asked about the infrastructure required to provide services to the occupants of new high density developments. Are models developed of future demands on water, electricity, transport, health services, schooling and policing? Is any work carried out to determine what is required to maximise the longevity and viability of a very high density housing development?

There exists growing support for maximising the sustainability of new developments, and for increasing the use of recycled materials, effective insulation, and equipment requiring low water consumption. This is well justified in view of the fact that, according to recent research, the existing building stock is responsible for 40% of CO₂ emissions in the UK. The use of good sound-proofing and effective natural lighting to improve the comfort of small homes contribute to this objective. However, these factors alone are insufficient in making a property “sustainable”.

Homes need to be built to adapt to the changing needs of a growing family. In addition, the ability for all members of a household to enjoy privacy, quiet relaxation and well-being are essential attributes of a desirable property. This is a key message of the Housing Space Standards report (see page 8). Privacy and quiet relaxation are also key features of a sustainable property, which people value and are committed to maintaining in good condition in the long term. Yet, it is a very minor component of the Government’s own Code for Sustainable Homes.

A well-designed and maintained physical environment can engender civic pride and promote community responsibility. This is not the preserve of exclusive or gated developments. For instance, the Capital Gains study mentioned at the beginning of this study attested to a “*sense of community and feeling of neighbourliness*” in the council and housing association estates examined, with little anti-social behaviour and low resident turnover.

In contrast, a concentration of poorly designed developments within an area is bound to have a profound negative impact on the social fabric, economic prospects and inward investment within the area. As in the case of the redeveloped Holly Street estate in Hackney, unwanted housing tends to be let to individuals with few economic options, and may contribute to a concentration of deprivation, including social and health problems, conflict and anti-social behaviour. These in turn will need to be addressed by the relevant local services, and could eventually lead to the premature tearing down of housing developments.

As a large number of homes are due to be built in the next few years, councils as well as central government need to do their utmost to keep room size and other building standards as high as possible, and to plan for densities which are sustainable, so that residents and the local economy may truly benefit from this significant building boom in the long term.

Appendix 1: Comparison of various sets of internal space standards

Borough	Minimum Floor Area (m ²)				Minimum Room Area (m ²)				
	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4+ Person	Living	Kitchen	Bedroom 1	Double Bedroom	Single Bedroom
1949 Housing Manual standards Flats	27.9 -1bed 32.5 -2bed	46.5		65.1 - 4p, 3 bed 69.7 - 4p, 4 bed 79 - 5p, 4 bed 83.6 - 6p, 4 bed 88.3 - 6p, 5 bed 92.9 - 7p, 5 bed					
1949 Housing Manual standards Houses or maisonettes	No figures available	No figures available	No figures available	69.7 - 74.3 4p, 2 bed 83.6 - 88.3 5p, 3 bed 91.1 - 95.7 6p, 3 bed 92.9 - 101.3 6p, 4 bed 102.2-109.2 7p, 4 bed					
Parker Morris Flats	29.7	44.6	56.7	69.7					
Parker Morris Houses			56.7	66.9- 74.3 4p. 75.3- 93.8 5p. 83.6- 97.5 6p. Varies with No of floors					
Housing Association Housing Quality Indicators (April 2007)	30-35	45-50	57-67	67-75 4p 75-85 5p 1 storey 82-85 5p 2 storeys 85-95 6p 1 storey 95-100 6p 2 storeys 100-105 6p 3 storeys 108-115 7p 2+ storeys					

Appendix 1: Comparison of various sets of internal space standards

Borough	Minimum Floor Area (m ²)				Minimum Room Area (m ²)				
	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4+ Person	Living	Kitchen	Bedroom 1	Double Bedroom	Single Bedroom
Hammersmith & Fulham Supplementary Planning Guidance	30	44.5	57	66-74.5 (4) 75.5-94 (5) 84-98 (6)					
Haringey Supplementary Planning Guidance	- All habitable rooms min width of 2.13m - All new homes to meet space standards and <i>Lifetimes Homes</i> - Storage space 7.5% of min floor space				11 (1p) 17 (7p)	5.5 - 9	8 - 11	10	6.5
Merton Supplementary Planning Guidance	- All new developments to be <i>Lifetime Homes</i> - Prefer design-led approach to density and space guidelines				11 - 18	5.5 - 9.5	8.5 - 11	10.5	6.5
Sutton Supplementary Planning Guidance					12.1 - 17.2	5.6 - 7.2	11	11	6.5
Waltham Forest Supplementary Planning Guidance					13 (1p) to 18.6 (6p)	5.5-8.5	8 - 11	10	6.5
Southwark Supplementary Planning Guidance	45	57-70	70-86.5	79-105	13-18.5	5.5-8.5	11	10	6.5
Tower Hamlets Supplementary Planning Guidance	30	44.5	57	67-74.5 (4p) 74-95 (5p) 84-98 (6p)	11-18	5.5-9.8	11	10.5	6.5
Wandsworth Supplementary Planning Guidance	30	45		60 (4p) 79 (5p) 86(6p)	11.2-15.8	5.6-7.4	8.4-11.2	10.2	6.5
NHBC Bedroom sizes								9 for 2 occupants	Under 9

Appendix 2: Room sizes of new-build homes on Croydon's housing market

The recommended surface area of a 4 person dwelling ranges from 65m² to 75 m²

Bedrooms measuring less than 9 m² are shown in bold.

Development	Surface Area (m ²)					Storage areas Estimated areas
	Living room	Kitchen	Bedroom 1	Bedroom 2		
Development 1 Flat 1	15.88	6.92	9.89	3.73m x 3.20m (triangular shape- complementary triangle: terrace)		2 in hall (1m ² each) Bed1: 2mx0.5m Bed2: 1.70mx0.7m
Development 1 Flat 2	19.77	6.02	9.07		10.35	1 in hall (1m ²) Bed1: 1.7mx0.5m Bed2: 1.5m x 0.7m
Development 1 Flat 3	17.13	7.09	11.41		7.90	2 in hall (1m ² each) Bed1: 1.20m x 0.5m Bed2: 1.50m x 0.7m
Development 1 Flat 4	4.92m x 3.81m Not full rectangle	7.28	3.24m x 2.98m Not full rectangle		8.42	1 in hall (1.5m ²) Bed1: 1.50m x .5m Bed2: 1.20mx 0.7m
Development 1 Flat 5	19.77	6.02	9.07		10.35	1 in hall (1m ²) Bed1: 1.80m x 0.7m Bed2: 1.20m x 0.7m
Development 1 Flat 6	18.25	7.30	11.22		7.94	2 in hall (1m ² each) Bed1: 1.20m x 0.7m Bed2: 1.40m x 0.7m
Development 1 Flat 7	18.74	7.28	9.65		8.42	1 in hall (1.5m ²) Bed1: 1.70m x 0.7m Bed2: 1.20m x 0.7m
Development 1 Flat 8	4.81m x 4.11m Not full rectangle	6.02	9.07		3.52m x 2.94m Not full rectangle	1 in hall (1m ²) Bed1: 1.50m x 0.7m Bed2: 1.20m x 0.7m
Development 1 Flat 9	18.25	7.30	11.07		7.94	2 in hall (1m ² each) Bed1: 1.20m x 0.7m Bed2: 1.40m x 0.7m

Appendix 2 continued: Room sizes of new-build homes on Croydon's housing market

The recommended surface area of a 4 person dwelling ranges from 65m² to 75 m²
Bedrooms measuring less than 9 m² are shown in bold.

Development	Surface Area (m ²)					Storage areas Estimated areas
	Living room	Kitchen	Bedroom 1	Bedroom 2		
Development 2 Flat 1	20.56m ²	5.24m ²	10.72m ²	12.61m ²		1 in hall: 1.30m ²
Development 2 Flat 2	5.19m x 5.14m Not full rectangle	5.26m ²	12.22m ²	4.80m x 3.23m Not full rectangle		1 in hall: 1.20m ²
Development 2 Flat 3	12.62m ²	5.53m ²	10.05m ²	12.50m ²		1 in hall 1.40m ²
Development 2 Flat 4	4.27m x 4.15m Unusual shape	5.99m ²	8.27m²	12.83m ²		1 in hall about 1m ²
Development 2 Flat 5	17.25m ²	6.40m ²	14.62m ²	6.71m²		1 in hall 2m ²
Development 2 Flat 6	15.62m Separ.dining area: 3.30m x 3.15m	6.38m ²	10.82m ²	3.13m x 2.94m Not a full rectangle		1 in hall About 1m ²
Development 2 Flat 7	17.45m ²	7.06m ²	16.84m ²	8.75m²		1 in hall About 2m ²
Development 3	Lounge/kitchen: 49.14m ² + additional study: 11.05m ²		12.94m ² + storage area	10.72m ²		See bedroom 1
Development 4	21.03m ²	6.53m ²	12.14m ²	8.11m²		Measurements not provided
Development 5	Lounge/kitchen 9.80m ²		6.18m²	12.45m ²		No information provided

Appendix 2 continued: Room sizes of new-build homes on Croydon's housing market

The recommended surface area of a 4 person dwelling ranges from 65m² to 75 m²
Bedrooms measuring less than 9 m² are shown in bold.

Development	Surface Area (m ²)					Storage areas Estimated areas
	Combined living room and kitchen	Bedroom 1	Bedroom 2	Bedroom 2	Bedroom 2	
Development 6 Flat 1	33.39	10.74	7.27 maximum			Airing cupboard
Development 6 Flat 2	23.35 maximum	11.84		11.50		
Development 6 Flat 3	27.31	10.56		6.22		Loft area Surface area of flat
Development 7 Flat 1	27.45	10.23		9.86		
Development 7 Flat 2	29.35	11.26		9.86		
Development 7 Flat 3	26.20	13.29		7.06		
Development 7 Flat 4	26.20	13.29		7.06		
Development 7 Flat 5	29.35	11.26		9.86		

