

# MINIMUM SPACE STANDARDS



## Technical housing standards – nationally described minimum space standard

In March 2015 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published planning guidance for new homes in England setting out minimum space standards for dwellings.

In September 2020 Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick announced all new homes in England delivered through permitted development (PD) rights will have to meet national space standards from 6 April 2021.

The necessity for these minimum space standards emerged from the need to address the unscrupulous behaviour of developers and rogue landlords whom had continued to show scant regard for the safety and welfare of residents.

The Northumberland & Newcastle Society (N&N) Planning & Development Committee reviews developments in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland. Over the years we have commented on developments where minimum space standards have not been adhered to and we have drawn attention to some developments being potential 'slums of the future'. The N&N fundamentally believes people have the right to live in safe, secure, comfortable homes with sufficient space to maintain a healthy, dignified way of life.

As one of England's oldest active civic trusts the N&N welcomes sensitive development of existing buildings including change of use to dwellings as we see this as a means of re-energising urban centres in response to the decline in traditional high street activity. As a general principle we will support such developments however we have noted a disturbing trend in planning applications where dwelling units are falling woefully short of compliance with minimum space standards. The 2015 standards are shown in the table below and can be seen in detail at:

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

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

In October 2018 the government reinforced these measures and introduced new minimum bedroom sizes for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

These are:

- Room used for sleeping by 1 adult: Not less than 6.51 m<sup>2</sup>.
- Room used for sleeping by 2 adults: Not less than 10.22 m<sup>2</sup>.
- Room used for sleeping by children of 10 years and younger: Not less than 4.64 m<sup>2</sup>.

The national standards specify a minimum of 37 m<sup>2</sup> for a one bedroom flat however we are regularly seeing applications substantially below this and in several cases around half that amount.

It is apparent to the N&N that some developers of commercial property have the specific intention of squeezing as many residential units into such buildings as they can structurally accommodate.

These schemes show no consideration whatever for the people whom would live in them or the communities where they are located. It seems more than a coincidence that the volume of applications the N&N has seen has increased as we approached the 6th April 2021 deadline.

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In particular we have noted at least 3 recent applications for schemes in Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne where plans submitted consistently show apartment sizes in the range 20-25 m<sup>2</sup>.

We have seen several other examples (including substantial developments) where plans do not specify the floor area of individual apartments. It is unclear if this is intentional or otherwise, however we believe planning authorities should reject any application that does not explicitly show compliance with national minimum space standards.

It should also be recognised these are minimum standards and no application even those in minor breach of them should be approved. Our belief is that permitting such breaches is profoundly unjust to the majority of responsible developers and sets an unacceptable and potentially dangerous precedent.

The tragic loss of life in the Grenfell Tower incident and the subsequent public inquiry shows the need for thorough application of building regulations and has highlighted the weaknesses of some aspects of construction material type approval.

As we emerge from the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic we should indeed 'build back better', ensuring peoples' physical and mental health and wellbeing are all primary considerations in the application of building regulations and planning legislation.

This issue is of grave concern to the N&N and one where we believe people in Newcastle and the wider North East region will share our deep misgivings. We recognise the great place-making efforts of responsible developers and building owners in seeking to protect and promote the fantastic heritage of the North East.

We feel the behaviour of unscrupulous developers motivated by pure profit risks spoiling our great city and we urge planning authorities and building control inspectors to rigorously enforce minimum space standards.

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The Northumberland and Newcastle Society is a volunteer based civic society dating from 1924 to protect and enhance the landscape, culture and built environment of Northumberland and Newcastle for the enjoyment of this and future generations.

The N&N's Planning & Development Teams sit monthly to consider planning applications relating to Conservation Areas and listed building consents within the City of Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside and Northumberland.

To fulfill its objectives, the N&N has established committees made up of society members whom have extensive professional experience and or great passion in respect of the built and natural heritage of the area.

Find out more at: <https://www.nandnsociety.org.uk>