Policy Title:

LP18 - Internal Space and Accessibility Standards

Existing Policies	**PSP37 – Internal Space and Accessibility Standards for Affordable Dwellings**
Non-Strategic / Strategic	**Non-Strategic**

Purpose

Homes must provide sufficient space for living, socialising, working from home or studying and be adaptable to cater for a variety of different household needs over time. Pressures to provide housing and to intensify uses presents a risk of erosion of internal spaces within new homes, which can have long-term consequences for health and wellbeing and daily living. This can particularly impact the most deprived communities in South Gloucestershire, which tend to be located in our urban areas and may have fewer choices about where to live. This policy requires the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) to be applied to all housing types, including market housing and Affordable Housing tenures.

Accessible homes flexibly support the changing needs of our communities, from raising children, to living independently with disabilities and promoting safe and inclusive communities for those who might need Extra Care. Our ageing population means that the proportion of households containing wheelchair users or with mobility impairments will also be higher, and homes will therefore need to meet the needs of users on occupation or through future adaptation. The policy sets out requirements relating to accessibility, including Building Regulations Approved Document M, M4(2) and M4(3).

Policy wording

1. **All new housing (Market and Affordable) will be required to meet the M4(2) accessible and adaptable dwellings standard and meet or exceed the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS), or any future replacement standards. Evidence should be provided with each application setting out areas for bedrooms, built-in storage, floorspace and ceiling heights for each dwelling.**

2. **As a minimum, all market housing for major development (10 or more dwellings) should provide 4% of dwellings built to meet the M4(3) (2a) standard (wheelchair adaptable housing); and**
3. **As a minimum, Affordable Housing for major development should provide 10% of dwellings built to meet the M4(3) (2a) standard (wheelchair adaptable housing); and**
4. **For specialist accommodation for older people, all dwellings, irrespective of tenure, will be required to meet Building Regulation M4(3) (2a) standard (wheelchair adaptable housing).**

Supporting text

1. The South Gloucestershire Council Plan and the Tackling Inequalities Plan, alongside other goals, aim to enhance health and wellbeing, promote suitable housing, and encourage healthy lifestyles. The Local Plan emphasises high-quality design and supports health and wellbeing objectives.

2. The application of space and accessibility standards ensures new developments are appropriately sized to meet the needs of residents and can adapt and evolve over time, including greater accessibility as people age, helping them remain in their homes longer. This policy is essential in supporting the objectives of both the Council Plan and the Local Plan.

3. This amended policy on internal space and accessibility standards sets out the requirements that all new types of housing must meet and is based on the requirements set out in the National Described Space Standards (NDSS), supported by the Internal Space Standards and Accessibility Topic Paper, the Building Regulations Approved Document M, M4(2) and M4(3) and the supporting Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA).

Space Standards

4. Where new dwellings are created with sufficient internal space, inhabitants are afforded a range of benefits including; the ability to better socialise with family members and guests, sufficient storage for household items, greater flexibility in arranging rooms to suit need, the ability to work from home, the ability to exercise at home, space for effectively managing waste and recycling, adequate access to daylight and ventilation, and allowance for adaptation should inhabitants suffer from permanent or temporary impaired mobility.

5. There is substantial evidence on the impact of housing and the homes in which we live, on health and well-being. The Covid-19 pandemic has drawn greater attention to the link between housing, health, and adequate indoor space and has amplified housing-related health inequalities. Research carried out during the pandemic highlighted that 31% of adults in Britain have been affected by mental or physical health problems due to the condition of, or lack of space in, their home during lockdown.

6. There are various ways in which the amount of space in a house may impact on health. Whilst the relationship is complex, several studies provide strong evidence of an association. Evidence suggests associations between overcrowded and inadequate space and poor health and development rates, infectious diseases, particularly respiratory illness, mental health and stress, and educational attainment.

7. This policy seeks to apply the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) to market and Affordable tenures, thereby ensuring an acceptable level of internal space across all new dwellings. The NDSS is a well-used national space standard and helps to ensure that appropriate living spaces are created. This was introduced in March 2015 by the Government through the Housing Standards Review. Space standards for new homes set out requirements for the floor space area and dimensions of the building according to the number of occupants, including dimensions for bedrooms, built-in storage and floor to ceiling height.

Accessibility Standards

8. The provision of appropriate housing for older people, physically disabled communities, long-term sick and those with invisible illnesses makes an important contribution to a safe and independent life. Additionally, an ageing population will see the numbers of disabled people continuing to increase in South Gloucestershire. Currently, 19% of the population are aged over 65, which is expected to increase to 21% by 2043. This is because people are living longer, but also because less people are choosing to have children. In 2011, around 14% of the South Gloucestershire population had a long-term health problem or disability that affected their ability to carry out day to day activities.

9. There is expected to be an increase of 9,300 additional households by 2040 where illness or disability affects their housing need. In addition, the latest South Gloucestershire Housing Strategy highlights the impact that housing has on health and wellbeing and recognises that the accessibility standards of new homes will have a positive impact on household health and welfare, and are particularly relevant to the protected groups, age and disability.

10. National policy and guidance enables local planning authorities to identify the proportion of dwellings in new developments that should comply with the accessibility requirements within the Building Regulations - Access to and use of buildings within Approved Document Part M (2015 & 2016), M4(2) and M4(3) as part of the Local Plan, based on the likely future need and taking account of the overall impact on viability.

11. The Local Housing Needs Assessment – Report of Findings 2023, sets out the evidence base for housing accessibility requirements within South Gloucestershire. It provides clear evidence of a need to support the M4(3) percentages for market, Affordable and age restricted housing outlined in this policy, providing that this does not compromise viability. Furthermore, it sets out that the Government proposes to mandate the current M4(2) (Category 2: Accessible and adaptable dwellings) requirement in Building Regulations as a minimum standard for all new homes, subject to a further consultation on the draft technical details.

12. There are a range of specialist needs which people have and while mobility issues are one of the critical ones to carefully consider, sensory impairments can also have a significant impact on how residents live and how the design of homes can support their needs. One example to be encouraged is the provision of fire safety equipment, such as smoke alarms, which can be designed with clear visual and sound warnings, to accommodate people with a range of impairments.

Application of Policy

13. The Council will generally seek to support truly innovative housing. Where it can be demonstrated that a dwelling will provide high levels of amenity through, for example, innovative methods of storage, high levels of daylight, and direct access to outdoor private space, the Council may make an exception and permit Affordable dwellings below the prescribed space standards.

14. Exceptional circumstances which might impact on the ability to achieve Building Regulations M4(2) and M4(3) are likely to be narrow in range, and limited to factors such as vulnerability to flooding, topography and where provision of a lift to dwelling entrances may not be achievable. Only in these circumstances which should be fully justified, may the Council agree to a reduced requirement.

Additions	
Key evidence	Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) - Report of Findings (2023) Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) – DCLG (2015) Internal Space and Accessibility Standards Topic Paper Building Regulations Approved Document M, M4(2) and M4(3) The South Gloucestershire Housing Strategy
Other relevant policies to cross-reference?	