Policy Title:

LP30 - Private & Communal Amenity Space Standards

Existing Policies Which adopted Core Strategy or Policies Sites and Places (PSP) policy would eventually be replaced	**PSP43 – Private Amenity Space Standards**
Non-Strategic / Strategic	**Non-Strategic**

Purpose

Access to high-quality and safe external amenity space is a critical part of the planning and design process and plays an important role in supporting people's mental and physical health. Therefore, all residential development must provide private or communal amenity space for the benefit of residents.

Changing working patterns are also leading to an increased number of people working from home, which puts a greater emphasis on the appropriateness and quality of the amenity spaces accessible to residents, including specialist residential schemes.

This policy continues the approach of ensuring that each new home is provided with appropriate private and communal amenity space. It focusses on setting out the types, quality and amount of private and communal space, which is required, to ensure all residential development is well-designed.

Policy wording

1. **All residential units, including those created by new development, change of use, and development involving residential extensions or sub-division of existing buildings, are required to have direct access to an appropriate level of private amenity space, such as a garden or balcony. External landscaped communal amenity space is also required within developments where any type and size of flats are provided; and**
2. **Private and communal external amenity space should be:**
    a) **functional and safe;**
    b) **directly and easily accessible from non-bedroom living areas;**
    c) **orientated to maximise sunlight;**
    d) **of a sufficient size, configuration and functional shape to meet the needs of the likely number of occupiers;**
    e) **Well-related to the built form of the scheme, incorporating appropriate and robust soft landscape planting;**
    f) **designed to take account of the context of the development, including the character of the surrounding area and height of the proposed building.**
3. **Provision of an appropriate level of private amenity space should meet or exceed the following minimum standards:**
    a) **1 bedroom flat 5m^2 + external landscaped communal space**
    b) **2+ bedroom flat 5m^2 + external landscaped communal space**
    c) **1 bedroom house 40m^2**
    d) **2 bedroom house 50m^2**
    e) **3 bedroom house 60m^2**
    f) **4+ bedroom house 70m^2**
4. **High-quality, landscaped external communal space must be provided for all types of flats, at a level which is appropriate to the scale and density of the proposed development, positioned in an easily accessible location, directly adjacent to the building which it serves. Any communal space should be subject to appropriate management controls to ensure proper long-term and proactive maintenance; and**
5. **For proposal(s) for specialist residential accommodation, including care homes, nursing homes, student accommodation, and other non-custodial institutions, the development must ensure sufficient high-quality and well-landscaped external communal space, with robust boundaries, to accommodate the normal recreational and other needs of residents, visitors or employees.**

Supporting text

1. This policy covers private and communal external amenity space applied within residential developments and should be considered alongside the Landscape and Public Open Space Standards policies.
2. The Council considers that access to appropriate and high-quality private and communal outdoor space plays an important role in the physical and mental wellbeing of people. Access to daylight, fresh air, space to dry washing, to socialise, to play in, to enjoy wildlife and to grow plants/vegetables, can add significantly to the quality of life of residents of all ages, and to healthy communities more generally.
3. Developments also need to be adaptable over time and take account of changing working patterns, as more people choose to work from home. The focus on making efficient use of land within national planning policy will lead to a greater emphasis on apartments within urban areas, and these types of developments must be provided with well-designed private and communal amenity spaces, as well as areas of public open space, such as play areas and parks.

Private amenity space

4. For the purposes of this policy, the two main types of amenity space are private, and communal. Private amenity space is both privately owned and directly accessible only from individual dwellings and must be provided for every new residential dwelling.
5. A range of private amenity spaces can be provided, the most common being gardens for houses and balconies for apartments. These are external spaces which are directly accessible to individual property owners and should ideally offer step-free access, which allows a greater level of accessibility, particularly for those with disabilities. Direct access is essential to ensure private amenity spaces can be easily used by all residents, irrespective of age or physical ability. Access should ideally be provided from primary living spaces, such as living and dining areas, rather than bedrooms, as this allows for the use of these primary spaces to be extended into the external environment and can improve ventilation and outlook from the most commonly used areas.
6. A reasonable level of privacy is required and involves limiting direct views from other private amenity spaces and from the public realm, such as surrounding streets. This can be achieved through careful consideration of how amenity areas are positioned, relative to each other, including the use of privacy screens for balconies which can reduce direct sight lines. For the rear gardens of houses, it is critical to ensure that the area closest to the back of the house is private, and full height (1.8m) fencing panels or equivalent walls should be used for the first 5m along a shared boundary with other gardens.
7. Balconies for apartments can either project away from the facade of the building, or be recessed within the building line, or a combination of both. Recessed balconies are a good way to create a higher level of privacy and protection from rain and wind and can be integrated into the overall design of an apartment building, allowing private amenity space to be used more comfortably and safely throughout the year.
8. Enclosing balconies as glazed, ventilated winter gardens is also appropriate in some circumstances. These are useful where dwellings will be exposed to high levels of noise and/or strong winds, particularly at a higher level, or where they are situated above the roofs of surrounding properties. Winter gardens should be usable as outside space,

thermally separated from the interior, and the floor should be 'drainable' to avoid standing water. Care should be taken to avoid overheating. A combination of projecting balconies at lower levels and recessed balconies at upper levels can also add architectural variation.

9. Roof terraces are typically provided at upper floors, to the front or rears of set-back top floor accommodation, or above ground floor garages, which can make good use of space and is an efficient approach.

10. Gardens for houses should be designed to easily accommodate bicycles, mobility scooters and bins, particularly where the garden can be accessed directly from the street. Where this is not possible, or access is provided via circuitous rear alleys, secure, bespoke covered storage should be provided in front gardens, designed and located to avoid obstructing ground-floor windows. This approach is useful in terrace houses and can be successfully integrated into the fronts of properties, in screened storage structures which are perpendicular to the main building, which can also be integrated within porch canopies, also providing bike storage and electrical car-charging cables. This type of approach also creates clear and robust boundaries between properties and can be successfully integrated with soft landscaping.

Communal amenity space

11. External, landscaped communal amenity space is shared among all of the dwellings within a block of flats and is required to be provided by all types of flats, in addition to private amenity space. In most cases, this should be provided within the space surrounding an apartment building, often adjacent to landscaped parking courts, as this creates an accessible arrangement, whereby residents can safely access and use the space, while also benefitting from active surveillance from the building itself, and the activity within the parking area. Any areas of communal space which are associated with an apartment building or groups of buildings, must be clearly differentiated from areas of publicly accessible space, such as play areas or streets, using appropriate boundary treatments. These boundaries should clearly indicate that these communal areas are not publicly accessible, common approaches being the use of low brick or stone walls, combined with railings, shrub and tree planting.

12. Communal amenity areas should be easily accessible and well-related to entrance/exit points of buildings and not comprise isolated site margins or incidental and small areas of land. Any communal space should be well-landscaped and not physically or visually dominated by parking and servicing areas, including associated built structures, such as electricity sub-stations or bin/cycle stores. A robust green landscape structure must be provided, that contributes to the enjoyment, microclimate and appearance of the amenity spaces.

13. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Creating Well-Designed Places, Landscaping and the Making Effective Use of Land policies. The intention is to create high-quality living environments for residents, with high amenity value, which help to contribute towards health and well-being. This approach also ensures that schemes do not become dominated by parking and access and provide a well-landscaped setting to all buildings.

Technical requirements

14. Safety is one of the critical considerations when designing private amenity spaces, particularly at first floor and above. Appropriate height guard rails or safety glass should be provided, and the use of horizontal railings should be avoided to prevent the possibility of climbing.

15. A range of finishes can be used for balconies and roof terraces, depending on the specific circumstances, but common approaches can include both solid and partially open balcony fronts and sides, using vertical metal railings, toughened safety glass or in some circumstances, solid panels. The design of any type of balcony or terrace must be carefully considered and integrated into the overall design of the building.

16. Providing good levels of natural light is one of the key requirements of private amenity space and projecting balconies can also function as solar shading for main living spaces, to limit excessive solar gain.

17. The size and functional shape of all private amenity space should be carefully considered. For private spaces associated with apartments, such as balconies and roof terraces, the depth and width must be sufficient to allow for easy movement around the space, and the provision of a table and chairs, taking into account the opening and closing of doors and windows. As a guide, a minimum of 1.5m depth will be considered appropriate.

18. For houses, the size and shape of rear gardens need to be considered as part of the design process. Irregular and awkward garden shapes, including diagonal boundaries, should be avoided, to create more usable spaces, reduce overlooking of neighbouring gardens, and to create clearer and more defined boundaries. Sufficient space must be provided to allow for a garden shed for general storage, including gardening equipment and bicycles, space for refuse and recycling bins, an area for clothes drying, circulation space, an area for children to play in, and to grow plants and vegetables.

19. The character of the surrounding area should also be taken into account. For example, deeper front gardens may be needed to reference adjacent building lines, to provide a positive setting for the property, and to allow for space for soft landscaping.

Minimum space standards

20. These space standards include the totality of balconies, front and back gardens, but do not include any access paths or car parking and turning areas. These figures are minimum sizes and larger sizes are encouraged, subject to making efficient use of land and the character of the surrounding area.

21. Where development is taking place to extend or sub divide an existing residential property, the remaining garden space for the updated or new property should not fall below the minimum standards set out in the policy. In circumstances where no private garden space originally existed, in most instances, further extensions or subdivision to create additional dwellings is unlikely to be acceptable.

22. In sustainable higher density developments, where land is optimised (see Policy LP1 - Effective Use of Land in Urban and Town Hubs), innovative approaches to the provision and form of private and communal space will be considered, subject to the space being provided meeting the other criteria set out in the policy and a positive living environment being created. This could include the private amenity space provision for houses being

split across various forms, including a rear garden, roof terrace above a garage, and a front garden. For apartments, a wider balcony which runs across the whole front of an apartment could be provided as an integral part of the overall design, or a deck-access arrangement where amenity space is integrated into the circulation space.

Specialist residential accommodation

23. Various types of specialist residential accommodation do not generally incorporate private amenity spaces which are accessed directly from individual living spaces or properties. In these cases, secure communal amenity space should be provided, which are well-designed, with a good balance of hard and soft landscape features, which use robust and high-quality building materials, with sufficient seating and pathways, which include a mix of sunlit and shaded areas.

Delivery

24. This policy will be delivered through the development management process.

Additions	
Key evidence	
Other relevant policies to cross-reference?	Saved Policy PSP2 - Landscape Saved Policy PSP44 - Open space, Sport and Recreation Saved Policy CS24 (and Appendix 5) - Green Infrastructure, Sport and Recreation Standards LPS12 - Creating Well-Designed Places Policy LP1 - Making Effective Use of Land in Urban and Town Hubs Policy