

# Housing Delivery Strategy for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

## Background Paper 5: Standards in New Homes

Submitted to  
**South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse District Council**  
**May 2017**

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# 1. Background and Scope of Background Paper

- 1.1 New national technical standards were announced by Government as part of a package in March 2015. The Code for Sustainable Homes was withdrawn and no other local technical standards or requirements are permitted. However, the new national technical standards are optional and should only be required through Local Plan policies if they address clearly evidenced need. Their impact on viability also needs to be considered. South and Vale Councils have an opportunity to take forward these standards into Local Plan policy.
- 1.2 The new approach to technical standards was launched in March 2015 under the 'housing standards review package' and gives local authorities the option to set technical standards exceeding the minimum required by building regulations in respect of accessibility. In addition, there is an optional 'nationally described space standard'. At present, there is no minimum space standard for new dwellings in the private sector, although many new affordable homes have been required to meet HCA Housing Quality Indicator space standards as a condition of grant funding.
- 1.3 The new optional accessibility standards are contained within Part M of Building Regulations. Part M (Access to and Use of Buildings) Approved Document 2015 Edition now describes three standards:
- Category 1 – known as 'visitable dwellings' – should be applied to all new dwellings and is not optional. This means that reasonable provision should be made for people to gain access to and use the dwelling and its facilities. This should include most people, including wheelchair users.
  - Category 2 is an optional standard known as 'accessible and adaptable' dwellings and is broadly equivalent to Lifetime Homes standards.<sup>1</sup> This requires that provision is made within new dwellings to meet the needs of occupants with differing needs including some older or disabled people and allow for the adaptation of the dwelling to meet the changing needs of occupants over time. This means that features are provided to enable common adaptations to be carried out in the future to increase the accessibility and functionality of the building.
  - Category 3 requires that provision must be made to allow simple adaptations of the dwelling to meet the needs of occupants who use wheelchairs eg making it easy to install a lift; or meet the needs of occupants who use wheelchairs eg a through floor lift is installed.
- 1.4 Anything other than the base line standard (Category 1) will only be permitted where the local authority has demonstrated that they address a clearly evidenced need, and where their impact on viability has been considered, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Guidance. Furthermore, Category 3 standards should only be applied where a local authority's allocation policies can match the home to a particular person, otherwise dwellings should be built to wheelchair adaptable level.

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<sup>1</sup> Category 2 requires step free access to the entrance storey, including WC. This is not a requirement of Lifetime Homes Standards.

- 1.5 The new Nationally Described Space Standards deal with the internal space within new dwellings. The standards set out the requirements for the gross internal area (GIA) of new dwellings at defined occupancy. They also set out floor areas and dimensions for key parts of the home, notably bedrooms and storage. It is relevant to note that these standards are not adequate for Part M (4) Category 3 wheelchair housing because of the additional internal area required for circulation in these homes.
- 1.6 Table 1 is taken from the document and summaries the space standards according to the size of home and number of occupants. Paragraph 10 of the Nationally Described Space Standards report provides guidance on how properties should conform to this standard.

**Table 1 - Minimum gross internal floor areas and storage (m<sup>2</sup>)**

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) <sup>2</sup>			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	

<sup>2</sup> Where a one person flat has a shower room rather than a bathroom, the floor area may be reduced from 39m<sup>2</sup> to 37m<sup>2</sup>.

- 1.7 South and Vale Councils wish to examine whether and how to adopt new technical standards in relation to space and accessibility within new build homes. Specifically, the Councils wish to examine:
- *Whether there is evidence to support the nationally described space standards being applied to new market and affordable housing.*
  - *Whether there is evidence to support the Council requiring developers to provide 'accessible and adaptable homes' (Category 2) and wheelchair accessible properties (Category 3).*
- 1.8 It is important to distinguish between market and affordable homes since different considerations apply in the implementation of these standards.

1.9 The rest of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 examines evidence of need.
- Section 3 outlines current practice and presents options for policy.



## 2. Evidence of Need

2.1 This section presents evidence to support the need for improved accessibility and space standards in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

### Accessibility

2.2 Planning Practice Guidance 'Housing – Optional Technical Standards' explains that in demonstrating the need to set higher accessibility, adaptability and wheelchair housing standards, local authorities should consider the following factors:

- The likely future need for housing for older and disabled people (including wheelchair user dwellings)
- The size, location, type and quality of new dwellings needed to meet specific evidenced needs (eg retirement homes, sheltered homes or care homes)
- The accessibility and adaptability of the existing housing stock
- How needs vary across different housing tenures
- The overall impact on viability.

### Older People

2.3 Background Paper 4 – Housing Market Needs and Opportunities examined the demand for accommodation from the growing older population. It focused on the need for specialist housing, particularly extra care accommodation. However, it is worth summarising the scale of this demographic group and the number of households who live, and are likely to continue to do so, within the mainstream housing stock. Much of the data and literature that relates to the older population provides information on the population aged 65 and over as this relates to traditional retirement patterns and changes in lifestyle associated with this. However, it is in the older age groups (75+ and 85+) where care needs tend to increase and where the greatest demand for specialist or adapted accommodated is generated.

- There are currently 27,400 over 65s in the population of South Oxfordshire and 24,400 in Vale. 3,800 of which are over the age of 85 in South Oxfordshire and 3,400 in Vale. Older people (aged 65+) account for 20% of the population in both authority areas.
- The population aged 65+ is projected to grow to 44,400 in South and 39,900 in Vale by 2039, with growth fastest amongst 85+ age group which will comprise 10,000 people in South and 8,900 in Vale in 2039 (ONS 2014 based Subnational Population Projections). In 2039, older people (65+) will account for 29% of the population in South and 27% of the population in Vale.
- Those aged 75 and over will account for 16% of the population in 2039 in both authority areas (25,300 people in South and 22,800 in Vale), an increase of 12,700 in South and 11,500 in Vale

from 2014. The 75+ threshold is used by the Housing LIN SHOP toolkit to forecast demand for specialist accommodation as it is associated with increased demand for care.

- The vast majority of older people currently live in mainstream housing. According to the Housing LIN SHOP toolkit, in 2014 just 2,500 of those aged 65+ in the two authorities lived in specialist accommodation (which excludes sheltered housing) with the vast majority (over 90%) of the 65+ age group living in the mainstream housing stock.
- If this pattern continues in the future, around 40,000 over 65s will be living in mainstream housing in 2039 in South. In Vale, around 35,000 over 65s will be living in mainstream housing in 2039.
- Government policy is to enable older people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible, by meeting care needs at home. However, Oxfordshire County Council has expressed concern about the implications of supporting people in their own homes, particularly older people in isolated areas. The County Council has made a strong commitment to expanding specialist extra care housing to enable more older people to live independently whilst accessing appropriate care.<sup>2</sup>
- Nevertheless, the mainstream housing stock needs to enable older people with care needs to live at home. In the past, this has been achieved largely through adaptations to homes eg installation of common features such as level access showers, stair lifts and handrails.

2.4 The scale of the older population and projections of growth, particularly amongst those in advanced older age, and the correlation between advanced old age and disability indicates the need for a housing stock in the future which is more accessible and adaptable.

2.5 In 2039, over one quarter of the housing stock in South and Vale will be occupied by people aged over 65. The vast majority of these households will want to continue to live in their own homes and will be supported in this aspiration through Government policy on care provision. It is amongst the older age groups – 75+ and 85+ that the need for accessibility and adaptations is most likely to apply.

## Disabled People

2.6 Evidence on levels of health problems and disability within the population support the need for accessible and adaptable accommodation.

2.7 There are 17,500 people living with a long term health problem or disability in South and 16,400 in Vale, 13-14% of all people in the two authority areas (Figure 2). This figure may provide the closest indication for the current need for housing which is accessible or adaptable.

2.8 Whilst the largest number, almost 24,000 people across the two authorities live in the owner occupied sector, the social rented sector is home to a disproportionate number of people with long term health problems or disabilities – 25% of all people living in the sector in South and 23% in Vale

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<sup>2</sup> A Framework for an Oxfordshire Extra Care Strategy – for Oxfordshire County Council 2008

(Figure 3). Of those people living with a long term health problem or disability, over 6,000 people in each authority find that their daily activities are limited a lot. This accounts for around 5% of all people in each authority area.

**Figure 2: People with Long Term Health Problem or Disability, By Tenure 2011**

	All Tenures	Owned or Shared Ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	17,526	12,500	3,578	1,448
Vale of Whitehorse	16,397	11,455	3,589	1,353
Oxfordshire	84,641	54,996	20,898	8,747
South East	1,278,964	845,010	289,474	144,480
England	8,936,954	5,504,929	2,416,745	1,015,280

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 3: People with Long Term Health Problem or Disability, By Tenure (%) 2011**

	All Tenures	Owned or Shared Ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	13%	13%	25%	8%
Vale of Whitehorse	14%	13%	23%	8%
Oxfordshire	14%	13%	24%	7%
South East	15%	14%	26%	10%
England	17%	16%	28%	11%

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 4: People with Long Term Health Problem or Disability, Activities Limited 'A Lot', by Tenure**

	All Tenures	Owned or Shared Ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	6,832	4,507	1,784	541
Vale of Whitehorse	6,458	4,091	1,829	538
Oxfordshire	34,249	20,115	10,777	3,357
South East	536,424	323,354	151,728	61,342
England	4,098,808	2,297,245	1,336,949	464,614

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 5: People with Long Term Health Problem or Disability, Activities Limited 'A Lot', by Tenure**

	All Tenures	Owned or Shared Ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	5%	5%	12%	3%
Vale of Whitehorse	5%	5%	12%	3%
Oxfordshire	5%	5%	13%	3%
South East	6%	6%	14%	4%
England	8%	7%	16%	5%

Source: Census 2011

- 2.9 Amongst the older population (aged 65+) there are 9,900 people with a long term health problem or disability in South Oxfordshire and 9,300 in Vale. This represents 42% of all people over the aged of 65 in South and 44% in Vale. The proportion of people aged over 75 with LTHP or disability is likely to be higher. Those aged 65+ account for more than half of all people with a long term health problem or disability.
- 2.10 In the social rented sector, 64% and 63% of those aged over 65 years of age have a long term health problem or disability in South and Vale respectively. Whilst the social rented sector has a disproportionate number of older people with a disability, there are significant proportions of older people living with disabilities in both the owner occupied and private rented sectors.

**Figure 6: Older People (Aged 65+) with Long Term Health Problem or Disability 2011**

	All Tenures	Owned or Shared Ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	9,874	7,715	1,646	513
Vale of Whitehorse	9,275	7,155	1,609	511
Oxfordshire	44,540	33,059	8,769	2,712
South East	654,402	498,463	113,862	42,077
England	4,297,932	3,076,195	935,937	285,800

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 7: Older People (Aged 65+) with Long Term Health Problem or Disability 2011**

	All Tenures	Owned or Shared Ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	42%	39%	64%	46%
Vale of Whitehorse	44%	41%	63%	51%
Oxfordshire	45%	41%	63%	50%
South East	46%	43%	65%	54%
England	52%	47%	69%	59%

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 8: Older People (Aged 65+) with Long Term Health Problem or Disability, Activities Limited a Lot**

	All Tenures	Owned or Shared Ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	4,224	3,105	872	247
Vale of Whitehorse	3,899	2,808	850	241
Oxfordshire	19,626	13,508	4,775	1,343
South East	290,116	206,655	62,401	21,060
England	2,085,119	1,383,056	547,470	154,593

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 9: Older People (Aged 65+) with Long Term Health Problem or Disability, Activities Limited a Lot**

	All Tenures	Owned or Shared Ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	18%	16%	34%	22%
Vale of White Horse	19%	16%	33%	24%
Oxfordshire	20%	17%	35%	25%
South East	20%	18%	36%	27%
England	25%	21%	41%	32%

Source: Census 2011

- 2.11 In terms of absolute numbers, the wards of Wantage Charlton and Didcot Park have the highest number of older people with long term health problems or disabilities – 680 and 590 people aged over 65 respectively.
- 2.12 Wantage Charlton, Didcot Park and Faringdon and Coxwells have the highest number of people (all ages) with long term health problems or disabilities with activities limited a lot.
- 2.13 Figure 10 shows that 4,100 people in South and 3,800 Vale are living with bad or very bad health - 3% of the population in each authority area. This compares to 5% of the population nationally. These people are a subset of those with a long term health problem or disability. Not all of the larger group will describe themselves as in 'bad health' even though they have a long term health problem or disability. The smaller number of people in bad health may have more urgent demand for adaptations to their properties in order to help them manage their conditions. Although the largest number of those in bad health (2,600 in South and 2,200 in Vale) live in the owner occupied sector, they make up just 3% of home owners. The social rented sector has a higher proportion of people in bad or very bad health (8% of people living in the sector in both authority areas).
- 2.14 Over half of people in bad or very bad health are older people, aged 65 and over. The same pattern is seen amongst the older population, with the highest proportion of people in bad health living in the social rented sector (19% and 18% of tenants aged 65+ in South and Vale).

**Figure 10: People in Bad or Very Bad Health, by Tenure 2011**

	All tenures	Owned or shared ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	4,099	2,553	1,183	363
Vale of White Horse	3,815	2,246	1,213	356
Oxfordshire	21,488	11,690	7,307	2,491
South East	349,331	195,698	107,268	46,365
England	2,769,456	1,426,789	984,500	358,167

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 11: People in Bad or Very Bad Health, by Tenure 2011**

	All tenures	Owned or shared ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	3%	3%	8%	2%
Vale of Whitehorse	3%	3%	8%	2%
Oxfordshire	3%	3%	9%	2%
South East	4%	3%	10%	3%
England	5%	4%	11%	4%

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 12: People Over 65 in Bad or Very Bad Health, by Tenure 2011**

	All tenures	Owned or shared ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	2,184	1564	499	121
Vale of Whitehorse	1,963	1360	472	131
Oxfordshire	10310	6810	2750	750
South East	160,796	110,877	37,540	12,379
England	1,208,897	766,798	348,123	93,976

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 13: People Over 65 in Bad or Very Bad Health, by Tenure 2011**

	All tenures	Owned or shared ownership	Social Rented	Private Rented or Living Rent Free
South Oxfordshire	9%	8%	19%	11%
Vale of Whitehorse	9%	8%	18%	13%
Oxfordshire	10%	8%	20%	14%
South East	11%	9%	21%	16%
England	14%	12%	26%	19%

Source: Census 2011

**Figure 14: People Claiming Disability Living Allowance (Nov 2015)**

	Total (all ages)	Aged 65 and over
South Oxfordshire	3,300	810
Vale of Whitehorse	3,390	830
Oxfordshire	18,700	4,570
South East	309,660	80,180
England	2,342,730	762,190

Source: ONS, Department for Work and Pensions data on Nomis web)

2.15 Another indicator of the level of poor health or disability within the population is provided by the number of people claiming disability living allowance (Figure 17), or the new personal independence payment which replaces it. Not all people living in poor health or with disabilities will claim this, or be eligible to claim it. But it gives an indication of the level of relatively serious health problems or disability within the population. The figures are broadly the same scale as the numbers who describe themselves as in bad health (Figure 10). These figures do not take account of children who may be in

ill health or have a disability and so the need for adaptations to homes may be higher than these figures imply. In South, 3,300 people claim DLA and 3,400 in Vale (which is being phased out for working age people).

- 2.16 At the national level, 2.3% of households in the owner occupied sector contain a family member that uses a wheelchair. In the social rented sector, the figure is noticeably higher at 7.1%.<sup>3</sup> Figures specifically for the Councils are not available.

**Figure 15: Adaptations Made to Properties in South**

		Total	Level Access Shower	Through floor lift
2015/16	RP	118	56	0
	Private	64	37	0
2015/14	RP	92	51	0
	Private	69	28	1
2014/13	RP	125	50	0
	Private	93	31	0
2012/13	RP	100	38	0
	Private	79	37	0
Average	RP	109	49	0
	Private	76	33	0

Source: South and Vale Councils

**Figure 16: Adaptations Made to Properties in Vale**

		Total	Level Access Shower	Through floor lift
2015/16	RP	101	75	5
	Private	72	38	2
2015/14	RP	57	36	1
	Private	72	28	2
2014/13	RP	69	44	2
	Private	83	31	0
2012/13	RP	72	46	0
	Private	76	34	1
Average	RP	75	50	2
	Private	76	33	1

Source: South and Vale Councils

- 2.17 Data is also collected on the number of adaptations made to properties in the two authority areas, funded by Disabled Facilities Grant. On average, over the last 4 years, 185 adaptations have been made each year to properties in South and 151 in Vale. In Vale, these were split equally between housing association properties and those in the private sector. In South Oxfordshire, the majority of adaptations were made to housing association properties.
- 2.18 The largest proportion of adaptations across both authorities and in both housing association and private stock were level access showers. These enable people with reduced mobility to use the

<sup>3</sup> CLG Guide to Available Disability Data 2015

shower. A small number of major adaptations were required including through floor lifts. The demand for through floor lifts provides some indication of the need for wheelchair accessible properties.

- 2.19 Very few wheelchair accessible properties become available for letting each year because there are very few available within the stock in the two authority areas. In the last 5 years, only a small number of fully wheelchair accessible properties have been developed in the two authorities (2 in Chinnor and 1 in Thame, with two others being considered including the merging of two 2 bed bungalows to create a 3 bed property to meet the needs of a family with a disabled member). In general, the approach taken is bespoke as each household has very different requirements – location being the most important.
- 2.20 The demographic and disability data suggests that there is a case for building up a stock of accessible and adaptable homes over the long term – in line with Category 2 of Building Regulations. The size of the older population (focusing on the 75+ population in 2039) suggests that, in the longer term, around 16% of the population will be in this age group and so a similar proportion of the housing stock should be capable of housing older people who are likely to have accessibility needs. Similarly, 13-14% of people in the two authorities have a long term health problem or disability and would likely benefit from properties which are accessible and adaptable.
- 2.21 However, an issue with such an objective in the market sector is that there is no guarantee that new Category 2 accessible and adaptable homes would be purchased by those who need them. Indeed, older home owners are the group least likely to move home. It is more likely that new homes with these features are taken up by younger households, who do not need the features and are unwilling to pay a price which reflects their additional costs. Unless these homes are developed on any significant scale, they will take longer to filter through in any numbers to those who need them.
- 2.22 However, ensuring a significant proportion (around 15-20%, broadly in line with the projected size of the 75+ population in 2039) would gradually change the adaptability of the housing stock over time and may allow the development of a submarket for this form of housing.
- 2.23 An alternative and more radical option would be to require 100% of new market homes to be accessible and adaptable. New completions add around 1% to the housing stock each year so it would take decades to have a significant impact on the stock as a whole unless the majority of new homes meet the standard. However, new completions often account for a substantial proportion of properties on the market (around 10% in any one year) and so if all new homes were accessible and adaptable, they could have a significant impact on the supply available to buyers.
- 2.24 The key barrier to delivering Category 2 homes in the market sector is the impact on build costs and therefore viability. These costs and impacts will need to be considered through viability assessments. Ultimately, the Councils will need to consider whether this is a policy priority, which might take precedence over the delivery of affordable homes (since most other development contributions are fixed in CIL).

- 2.25 The case for building accessible and adaptable homes, in line with Category 2, is much more clear-cut in the affordable sector for the following reasons:
- The proportion of disabled people in the social rented sector is higher than in other tenures. This is particularly true for older people with health problems or disabilities (64% of all older people in South and 63% in Vale in the social rented sector have a long term health problem or disability). The Councils need to ensure that the affordable housing stock is capable of meeting their needs.
  - The Councils have control over the occupancy of the affordable housing stock so can ensure, as far as possible, accessible and adapted homes are available to those with specific needs.
- 2.26 There is evidence of need for a small number of wheelchair accessible properties (Category 3) within the affordable housing sector. WEc suggests that around 5% of all new affordable homes should meet this standard to maintain supply over time. However, the majority of wheelchair accessible properties in the housing stock have been developed through adaptation to existing homes. It would be worth reviewing the costs of these adaptations and comparing this to the additional cost of providing new wheelchair accessible homes to ensure that such a policy would represent good value for money.
- 2.27 In the market sector, given the relatively small need for these properties (2.3% of all home owners need them nationwide), developers are unlikely to want to build them speculatively. There is also no allocation system in place to match new wheelchair accessible properties to those who need them. Indeed owner occupiers exercise a much greater degree of choice over where they live and so new wheelchair accessible market homes becoming available on new schemes have no guaranteed market.
- 2.28 This might be addressed through a requirement on developers to make provision for wheelchair accessible homes in their new development (eg notionally set aside 1 or 2 plots which could be developed as such), but only required to build once a buyer has been secured. This should work with the model house builders use for the development of new houses (not flats) where new homes are built at the rate equivalent to sales. It could also help to ensure that the additional build costs are passed on to the buyer, rather than impacting on the developer's profits or through a negative impact on the developer's ability or willingness to support affordable housing contributions. This would also ensure that the features in the property match the individual needs of the buyer.

## Space Standards

- 2.29 The rest of this section considers the evidence on the space (floor area) in homes within the two authority areas. It is based largely on a survey of all the properties advertised for sale on Rightmove in January 2017 and the floor area (gross internal area) of these properties where this information is provided.

- 2.30 South and Vale Councils are interested in examining the size of dwellings, in terms of floor area, that are available within the two authority areas.
- 2.31 The key driver over the space provided in new homes is high land values. In simple terms, the price of space is high. In response, developers tend to build and buyers purchase and occupy smaller homes. The space that any household occupies is determined by what they can afford not the size of their household or their particular needs.
- 2.32 The space available in homes in the affordable housing sector is particularly important because these homes are occupied intensively. Households are allocated the minimum amount of space they require, with young children expected to share bedrooms. The space available to households in affordable housing has come under even more pressure since the introduction of the 'bedroom tax' which reduces benefit payments to working age people who are under occupying their homes.
- 2.33 Where homes are fully occupied it is therefore important to ensure that the space available is sufficient to meet needs.
- 2.34 Space standards have been applied to all new affordable homes built under the HCA's development programme in recent years and these standards broadly match those set out in the Government's new 'nationally described space standards', although the new standards are slightly more generous.

**Figure 17: HCA's Housing Quality Indicator Space Standards Compared with Nationally Described Space Standards**

Number of Bedrooms	Bed Spaces/ Persons	HCA HQI Standard (sq m)	Nationally Described Space Standard (sq m)
1 bedroom	1 bed space	30-35	39 (37)*
	2 bed spaces	45-50	50
2 bedrooms	3 bed spaces	57-67	61-70
2-3 bedrooms	4 bed spaces	67-75	70-90
3-4 bedrooms	5 bed spaces	75-95	86-103
4-5 bedrooms	6 bed spaces	85-105	95-116
4-6 bedrooms	7 bed spaces	108-115	108-129
4-6 bedrooms+	7+ bed spaces	+10 sq m per person	125-138**

\*Where a one person flat has a shower room rather than a bathroom \*\*relates to 8 person/bedspace properties

- 2.35 In the market sector, occupancy of homes does not relate closely to the size of the household. Households have a greater tendency to buy and occupy homes according to their income and life stage and levels of under occupancy are often high.
- 2.36 Local authorities cannot control the occupancy of market homes (with the exception of some Houses in Multiple Occupation in the private rented sector). Local authorities have very weak influence over the amount of space that households in the owner occupied sector occupy.

- 2.37 However, local authorities may be more concerned with the space available to occupants in the private rented sector. Overcrowding is more of an issue in this sector than the owner occupied sector (see working paper 1), albeit there are not high levels of overcrowding in the two authorities on average. Smaller properties (1 and 2 bedrooms flats and houses) are most likely to be let out in the private rented sector. Where tenants are dependent on housing benefit, they are likely to be fully occupying their properties. There is, therefore, a case for ensuring private properties meet minimum space standards to ensure that, if they are let out to tenants, their tenants benefit from sufficient space.
- 2.38 Policies to increase the floor area of new homes in line with space standards may result in higher prices for those units – partly because of higher build costs but mainly because of high land values. More space in individual homes will result in more land being used to deliver the same number of homes, or result in smaller garden sizes and less amenity space. All other things being equal, some households could be priced out of the market for new homes.
- 2.39 However, another concern over the space within new dwellings relates to the flexibility and adaptability of the housing stock over time. This is particularly true of small flats which have little prospect of being extended and so the space inside is always limited to its original floor area. In contrast, small properties built in the past (such as terraced housing originally built in the Victorian era) have been capable of extension eg into back garden, side return or loft. The size of new dwellings therefore also needs to be judged in the context in which they are developed. For example, if the original floor area is small, whether there is space to extend the dwelling within its plot.

**Figure 18: Average Internal Floor Area (GIA) of Homes for Sale in South and Vale, January 2017**

Number of Bedrooms	All Properties (sq m)	New Properties (sq m)	Nationally Described Space Standard (Range dependent on occupancy and number of storeys in dwelling)
1 bed	46.6	39.8*	39-58 sq m
2 bed	71.6	66.2	61-79 sq m
3 bed	107.2	116.1	74-108 sq m
4 bed	tbc	Tbc	90-130 sq m

Source: Rightmove \*based on 4 properties which provided GIA data, 3 of which were below the minimum space standard

**Figure 19: Proportion of Properties Below Nationally Described Space Standard**

Number of Bedrooms	All			New		
	Total on market with GIA data	Number below standard	%	Total on market with GIA data	Number below standard	%
1 bed	76	17	22%	4	3	75%
2 beds	221	71	32%	25	10	40%
3 beds	394	26	7%	13	1	8%
4 beds	691	7	1%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	1,382	122	9%			

Source: Based on survey of Rightmove January 2017 Note: Too few 4+ bed new build properties with GIA data to provide data on the number that fall below standard.

**Figure 20: Example of New Build Scheme, Great Western Park, Didcot**

Property Size	Gross Internal Area of Smallest Home Available (sq m)	Gross Internal Area of Largest Home Available (sq m)
2 bed	52.2	67.8
3 bed	70.1	113.3
4 bed	88.7	118.4

Source: Based on David Wilson Homes brochure. WEC calculated GIA of property from individual GIA of rooms. Total GIA may differ slightly from actual due to rounding.

2.40 WEC has reviewed the available data on the gross internal area (GIA) of homes on the market within South and Vale, using information from floorplans on Rightmove (Figure 19). It is important to note that these GIA measurements are often approximate, but nevertheless provide a guide as to the size of the housing stock. There were 1,380 properties on the market which had GIA information (out of a possible 1,850), 75% of all properties marketed for sale. The sample includes a mix of old and new homes and of varying types and sizes. In summary:

- The majority of dwellings in South and Vale, as represented by properties on the market for sale, meet or exceed the new nationally described space standards in terms of Gross Internal Area (GIA).
- However, that 22% of 1 bedroom properties and 32% of two bedroom properties fall below the new space standards is cause for concern. Smaller properties are more likely to be fully occupied, particularly if they are rented. This is an additional indicator of poor affordability, with certain locations in the authority areas experiencing greater pressures that are reflected in the size of properties available.
- Furthermore, the small number of new build properties advertised with GIA information makes it difficult to examine whether there is a particular problem with *new* properties, compared to those in the existing stock. The data available gives some cause for concern because a number of newly built 1 and 2 bed properties fall below the minimum space standards.

- The difficulty in monitoring the internal floor area proposed in new developments presents a problem if the Councils wish to apply the new space standards. In order to apply such a policy the Council would need to ensure that developers routinely provide data on GIA for each dwelling as well as the number of bedrooms in their applications for both market and affordable homes and that this is recorded in a way that can be monitored and analysed.
- WEC has not been able to review whether detailed requirements such as the size of the master bedroom, ceiling heights and storage areas are in line with the new standards, although information on floorplans suggest that, on the whole, master bedrooms do meet the new minimum standards.
- To supplement the information on new dwellings, WEC has examined an example of properties available from David Wilson Homes at Great Western Park in Didcot where GIA information is made available in the marketing brochure (see Figure 20). A range of 2-4 bedroom properties are being marketed. In general, the range of properties available have floor areas which exceed the minimum space standards. There are some 2 bed properties that fall below the minimum standard (52 sq m compared to 61 sq m in the new standards). However, it is less easy to identify this as a problem in the market sector since buyers are more likely to under occupy their homes. Furthermore, these are likely to have been provided to improve affordability and choice. Measures to increase the size of these properties might, other things being equal, lead to an increase in price.
- There are some locations within South and Vale where properties appear more likely to fall below the new minimum space standards:
  - i. Amongst one bedroom properties which fell below the minimum standard (17 in total), there were 5 flats in Henley on Thames and 5 flats in Abingdon that fell below the minimum standard.
  - ii. Amongst two bedroom properties which fell below the minimum standard (71 in total), there were 12 properties in Abingdon, 9 in Didcot, 6 in Henley on Thames, 5 in Chinnor and 4 in Botley (Vale).
- It is relevant to note that sheltered and retirement properties often did not have GIA information on floorplans. These homes are likely to be among the smallest properties. However, of the 28 one bedroom extra care or retirement properties advertised with GIA information, only 4 fell below the minimum space standard. Amongst 2 bed extra care and retirement properties, 7 provided GIA data of which 4 fell below the minimum standard. There is a question as to whether any exceptions should be made for specialist housing, particularly where communal areas and facilities are provided. The national standards do not refer to specialist accommodation.

2.41 In summary, there is evidence of a substantial proportion of small properties within the market sector in the two authority areas that fall below the new nationally described space standards. This evidence is supportive of a policy which introduces these space standards as a means to improve the

space available, particularly amongst the smallest properties that are most likely to be fully occupied and may also be rented privately to more vulnerable households.

### 3. Options for Policy

- 3.1 This section examines briefly how far these new accessibility and space standards are already being achieved in new housing development in the authority areas. Although this report does not examine the viability of providing these housing standards, existing practice in delivering them can provide an indication of how viable they are to meet.
- 3.2 This section then considers options for policy within the two Councils to improve housing standards in future development.

**Figure 3.1: Relevant Local Plan Policies**

***South Oxfordshire Core Strategy December 2012***

Policy CSH4 sets out that:

10% of market homes on sites of 10 dwellings or more should be designed to Lifetime Homes standards.

For affordable housing, all ground floor properties should meet Lifetime Homes standards.

The policy also states that provision of dwellings for people with additional special needs will be sought as part of the overall affordable housing contribution.

Specialist accommodation for older people should be provided in the new greenfield neighbourhoods identified in the Council's Core Strategy and will be permitted in suitable locations.

***Vale Local Plan Part 1***

Core Policy 6 states that all new homes for older people should meet Lifetime Homes Standard (or equivalent).

Vale plans to adopt the same policies as in South Oxfordshire when Local Plan Part 2 is adopted.

#### Existing Practice: Affordable Housing

- 3.3 'Accessible and adaptable' dwellings, broadly in line with the optional standard Category 2 of Building Regulations, have been delivered in new affordable homes in South Oxfordshire since 2012 when Lifetime Homes standards were adopted in the Core Strategy (see Figure 3.1). Prior to this, there was a requirement for 10% Lifetime Homes in affordable properties in both authority areas.
- 3.4 The HCA's Housing Quality Indicator space standards have also been delivered on new affordable homes in both authority areas as providers have complied with grant conditions. The HQI space standards are broadly in line with the new nationally described space standards, although the new standards are slightly more generous for dwellings of all sizes than the HQI standards. Applying the new nationally described space standards to new affordable housing may require RPs and developers to build larger units than they have been developing in recent years in some instances.

## Existing Practice: Market Housing

- 3.5 South Oxfordshire's Core Strategy Policy CSH4 requires developers to build 10% of market homes to Lifetime Homes standards on sites of 10 dwellings or larger. Vale plans to adopt the same policy as its Local Plan Part 2 is developed.
- 3.6 Market housing developed in the two authority areas is not currently required to meet any minimum space standards.
- 3.7 Evidence from the new homes on the market currently suggest that most homes on sale meet the new space standards, in relation to the internal floor area. However, there are some exceptions amongst 1 bedroom flat and 2 bedroom properties (flats and houses). There is also some evidence to suggest new build properties are more likely to fall below minimum standards than those in the existing stock, but the sample size is small so it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. WEc has not been able to review whether detailed requirements such as the size of the master bedroom, ceiling heights and storage areas are in line with the new standards, although information on floorplans suggest that, on the whole, master bedrooms do meet the new minimum standards.
- 3.8 There is insufficient readily accessible information contained in planning applications to assess the GIA and other space standards against the dwellings proposed. Data collection should be amended to capture this information in the future.

## Policy Options: Accessibility Standards

- 3.9 The evidence in this report supports the case for around 15% of new homes being delivered to Category 2 Building Regulations standard based on the proportion of older (75+) people in the population in 20 years time (16% by 2039) and the incidence of long term health problems and disability in the population (13-14% of people in 2011). WEc suggest that, over time, the Councils adopt a target of 15% *market* homes to be developed at Category 2 standard. Those aged 75+ are more likely to need accessible and adaptable homes and it is the age threshold used in 'More Choice; Greater Voice' to forecast demand for specialist accommodation. This would not ensure that older people end up in these homes, but a submarket might develop over time (much like with the market for bungalows or sheltered homes) where older people recognise the advantage of these properties and are prepared to move to them and outbid other buyers.
- 3.10 South Oxfordshire's Core Strategy has a requirement for all affordable homes to be provided at Lifetime Homes standard, with 10% of market homes provided at the same standard so this would represent a modest increase on the target set out in current policy. Lifetime Homes standard is broadly equivalent to Category 2 of Building Regulations (with the exception of step free access to the entrance storey).
- 3.11 In relational to affordable housing, the Council should adopt and apply Category 2 of the Building Regulations, which is broadly equivalent to Lifetime Homes Standard. This is already being delivered in affordable housing in the two authority areas which would suggest that it is achievable, viable and part of established practice.

- 3.12 Furthermore, there is evidence from the Council’s Disabled Facilities Grant applications of the need for some homes to meet the needs of people who have limited mobility and those who use wheelchairs and may need Category 3 dwellings. It is difficult to be precise about the level of need for fully wheelchair accessible dwellings required in affordable housing but WEC suggest that up to 5% based on the data in the current waiting list and DFG applications.
- 3.13 WEC suggest an additional requirement for a proportion of wheelchair accessible affordable properties, in line with demand on the waiting list and applications for Disabled Facilities Grants. Category 3 standards should only be applied where a local authority’s allocation policies can match the home to a particular person, otherwise dwellings should be built to wheelchair adaptable level. WEC estimate the level required in affordable housing to be up to 5% but the two Councils will need to monitor their waiting lists and DFG applications on an ongoing basis.
- 3.14 In market homes, there could be a requirement for developers to set aside 2% of homes to be developed as wheelchair accessible Category 3 properties (in line with national wheelchair usage amongst owner occupiers). WEC suggest that these plots could be developed if buyers come forward so that developers can guarantee a sale, additional costs can be passed on to buyers and so that buyers can specify their particular requirements. This approach may work best on large sites (over 100 homes) where developers are building out in phases and where homes can be presold or reserved by buyers and there remains some flexibility over internal specifications.
- 3.15 As an alternative to this policy, South and Vale Councils could consider accepting contributions for wheelchair accessible properties from developers and using these funds to boost the Councils’ Disabled Facilities Grant budget. This would allow the Councils to continue their bespoke approach to providing properties adapted to the need of occupants, where securing homes in the appropriate location for the occupant is often key to meeting needs.
- 3.16 South and Vale could consider the viability impact of applying Category 2 ‘accessible and adaptable’ dwellings to all market homes and specifically those planned to be developed at Didcot Garden Town and Berinsfield. This approach would have the greatest impact on the housing stock over time, as new development adds around 1% to the housing stock each year. This would mean that, after 20 years, around 20% of the housing stock would be accessible and adaptable for most people to live in as they age. Theoretically, if the stock of Category 2 homes grew to represent 20% of all homes it would allow the majority of older people to access these properties, providing they are willing to buy and move into them. This could have benefits for health and social care outcomes in the long term.
- 3.17 The main constraint on applying Category 2 universally is the additional build costs incurred compared to standard building regulations and the impact this could have on the viability of development, given that Category 2 homes may not command a price premium. Ultimately, this rests on whether the Councils are willing to ‘trade’ other policy objectives to achieve this increase in standards; or whether they are successful in securing funding from the Government for Didcot Garden Town in order to deliver improved standards.
- 3.18 It is relevant to note that ‘accessible and adaptable’ dwellings (Category 2) is not directly comparable to Lifetime Homes Standards because it includes step free access to dwellings. This would imply the need for low rise flats and town houses to have lifts and in many cases, this would damage

development viability. WEC's understanding is that the step free access required by 'accessible and adaptable' dwellings applies to the entrance storey so this does not mean that town houses would need to have lifts providing there is step free access to the ground floor and to a WC and accommodation. There may be an issue for low rise flats, where there would not have been a lift provided otherwise and also conversions of houses into flats. WEC suggest that this could be addressed by caveating the policy so that, where this would imply the provision of a lift and where that would make the development unviable, this requirement could be flexed. For low rise flats, a compromise might be to provide step free access to the ground floor accommodation (which will increase the provision of accessible accommodation) but not expect this to be applied to the whole building where it is unviable to do so.

- 3.19 WEC recommend that the Councils monitor implementation of 'accessible and adaptable' dwellings (Category 2) as a replacement for Lifetime Homes standards and in particular in terms of any impact on viability.

### Policy Options: Space Standards

- 3.20 In relation to *affordable* housing, WEC suggest South and Vale seek that all homes comply with the new nationally described space standards. These are broadly in line with those that have been applied by the HCA's Housing Quality Indicators on affordable housing schemes which have received grant funding in recent years. These standards are critical in affordable housing because these homes are fully occupied and so space standards provide a minimum guarantee of space for their occupants. Though it is important to acknowledge that overcrowding in relation to occupancy criteria remains a problem within affordable housing and space standards will not solve this; it is more affordable housing that is required.
- 3.21 The case for the application of space standards in the *market* sector is less about occupancy and guaranteeing space to occupants but more about the flexibility and adaptability of the housing stock in the long term.
- 3.22 Given current evidence of some 1 bedroom flats and 2 bedroom properties falling below nationally described space standards, there is a strong case for applying a minimum dwelling size for all dwellings of 39 sq m. This is the minimum size for a 1 bedroom flat in the 'nationally described space standards' guidance. The standards set out in paragraph 10 of the nationally described space standards would apply in terms of the measurement of the property.
- 3.23 The Councils may also wish to make exceptions for some specialist forms of housing, extra care housing for example or supported housing, where communal facilities are provided. It may not be desirable to apply space standards to housing with care because of the cost this would add to developments which already find it difficult to compete with mainstream developments for land.
- 3.24 In the market sector, some larger properties may fall below the new nationally described space standards for overall GIA but, in most cases, it is difficult to identify this as a real problem because buyers of these new properties have a choice over whether they buy them and how they occupy them. There are numerous larger properties available at comparable prices in the existing stock which are substitutable. Most owner occupiers also under-occupy their homes.

- 3.25 However, the survey identified a number of 2 bedroom properties on the market in Didcot which fell below the minimum space standard. As part of the Garden Town plans, the Council aims to transform the quality of accommodation available in the town and to improve the image of Didcot as a place to live. Applying minimum standards to properties which are developed as part of the Garden Town could be part of the approach to improving quality of the housing offer.
- 3.26 The two Councils need to consider whether to apply the space standards in full, across all sizes of market properties, or whether the standards should focus only on the smallest 1 bedroom and possibly 2 bedroom properties, for the reasons described above.
- 3.27 At present, WEC would see limited value in requiring space standards on larger properties (3 bedrooms and larger). There is little evidence that homes do not comply with the new standards or that there are problems caused by excessively small dwellings being developed amongst 3 bed properties and larger homes. There is flexibility with many of these properties to extend and adapt over time. However, arguably, if larger properties are already complying with space standards then there should be little impact in requiring new developments to meet the nationally described space standards.
- 3.28 Furthermore, if larger houses do not meet the space standard developers may just start describing them as smaller properties in their planning applications, with no change in what is actually built. How these properties are marketed by estate agents once completed is not within the Councils' control as long as they meet building regulations standards.
- 3.29 If the Councils choose to adopt the nationally described space standards in full, across all sizes of market homes, there are likely to be some locations that are affected more than others – where more acute affordability pressures are encouraging developers to provide smaller units.
- 3.30 Given that the majority of properties in the area do meet the space standards, the introduction of the standards should not prove onerous to most new developments. However, there will be developments in particular locations where the standards will demand redesign of a scheme which could impact on viability. In some cases, a larger floor area will result in the properties being sold at a higher price which will impact on affordability for buyers and renters.
- 3.31 Overall, WEC suggest South and Vale Councils monitor the GIA of individual homes in new schemes by requiring developers to report information on proposed dwelling mix in line with national space standards with a view to introducing space standards in their local planning documents. This could be incorporated into CIL data collection or as part of the planning application process..