

# Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments National Planning Statement 2026

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Re: Planning Design Standards for Apartments National Planning Statement, 2026

## Submission on Failure to Assess Reasonable Alternatives and Environmental Effects

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We wish to make a submission regarding the Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report accompanying the Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments National Planning Statement 2026. We also support the separate submission by Frank McDonald.

This submission should be read together with the attached appendices, comprising expert planning and technical assessments that provide detailed analysis relevant to the issues raised herein. In particular, the appendices contain evidence relating to apartment mix, occupancy density, population density, land use, infrastructure demand, resource efficiency, embodied carbon, health and wellbeing, crowding, housing conditions, natural lighting, social isolation, community cohesion, residential amenity, housing quality, accessibility, local authority planning functions, the interaction of national standards with development plans, overheating risk, daylighting, ventilation-related performance, indoor environmental quality, energy demand, global warming potential and other environmental considerations arising from the proposed standards. References throughout this submission to matters identified in the appendices are intended to incorporate those analyses and findings by reference.

### 1. Failure to Consider Reasonable Alternatives

Article 5 and Annex I(h) of Directive 2001/42/EC (the SEA Directive) require the identification, description and evaluation of reasonable alternatives, taking account of the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme.

The SEA Environmental Report identifies only two alternatives:

- Alternative 1 – Do not progress the Draft NPS and retain the 2025 Apartment Guidelines indefinitely;
- Alternative 2 – Progress the Draft NPS.

The Environmental Report acknowledges that under both alternatives, the 2025 apartment standards would remain in force and that both alternatives operate within the same wider planning framework.

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In substance, the alternatives assessed differ only in the legal mechanism through which the apartment standards are implemented. Alternative 1 retains the 2025 Guidelines, while Alternative 2 reissues those standards through a National Planning Statement.

The SEA therefore does not assess any meaningful alternatives relating to the content of the apartment standards themselves. This omission is particularly significant because internal Departmental analyses undertaken during preparation of the Draft NPS expressly compared alternative apartment standards and modelled their effects on unit numbers, bedspaces, floorspace and development capacity. Those analyses demonstrate that different standards were available and were understood by the Department to produce materially different planning and occupancy outcomes. The Department's own modelling further demonstrated that alternative standards could produce materially different outcomes not merely in relation to dwelling numbers but also in relation to bedspace capacity, occupancy levels and population-accommodation capacity. The appendices identify examples in which developments of comparable physical scale accommodate materially different numbers of people depending upon the standards applied. The Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments 2023 constituted more than a different policy option; they established a distinct environmental and operational standards framework capable of producing materially different effects on land use, infrastructure demands, and resource consumption. Accordingly, the 2023 Guidelines constituted a reasonable alternative requiring assessment under Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive. In particular, the SEA does not assess the provisions of the existing Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments 2023 as alternatives to the proposed new policies, despite those Guidelines constituting the most recent nationally applicable apartment-design regime in force immediately prior to the introduction of the 2025 standards and therefore representing a reasonable and readily available alternative for assessment.

The context in which this SEA has been prepared further reinforces the importance of a robust alternatives assessment. Although maintaining its position in the ongoing McDonald proceedings that the 2025 Apartment Guidelines did not require Strategic Environmental Assessment, the Minister nevertheless decided to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the replacement National Planning Statement on a precautionary basis, having regard to the pending decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union in Case C-116/26, *McDonald and Others*. Having elected to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment, the Environmental Report was required to comply with the substantive requirements of Directive 2001/42/EC, including the obligation under Article 5 and Annex I(h) to identify, describe and evaluate reasonable alternatives. The limited alternatives assessment contained in the Environmental Report, which compares only different legal mechanisms for implementing substantially the same standards, does not satisfy that requirement.

The obligation to assess reasonable alternatives cannot be avoided by defining the objectives of a plan or programme so narrowly that only a single policy outcome remains available for consideration. The purpose of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process is to inform plan preparation before policy choices are irrevocably fixed. While the Draft NPS may have been prepared to replace the 2025 Apartment Guidelines through a National Planning Statement, that objective did not preclude consideration of alternative apartment standards capable of achieving broader housing and planning objectives through different means. The existence of internally modelled alternatives demonstrates that different policy options

remained available during preparation of the Draft NPS and therefore constituted reasonable alternatives for assessment under Article 5 and Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive.

The existence of reasonable alternatives must be assessed by reference to the objectives of the Draft NPS and the planning issues it seeks to address, rather than by reference to a predetermined preference for the substantive content of the 2025 Apartment Guidelines. The Department's own internal analyses demonstrate that alternative apartment standards were actively developed, tested and compared during preparation of the Draft NPS and were regarded as capable of achieving housing-delivery and planning objectives through materially different design standards. Those alternatives therefore fell within the range of options reasonably available to the plan-making process and therefore warranted consideration within the alternatives assessment required by Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive. They could not properly be excluded from assessment merely because the Department preferred to retain the substantive content of the 2025 Apartment Guidelines.

The existence of internally developed and quantified alternatives distinguishes this case from one in which an authority contends that no reasonable alternatives existed. Here, the Department itself identified, analysed and compared materially different apartment standards during preparation of the Draft NPS. The issue is therefore not whether alternatives existed, but whether alternatives already forming part of the Department's own policy-development process were identified, described and evaluated in accordance with Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive.

This understanding is consistent with correspondence from An Coimisiún Pleanála dated 12 June 2026, which describes the standards in the Draft NPS as substantively the same as the 2025 Guidelines and identifies the principal difference as the inclusion of SEA documentation. While expressing no view on the adequacy of the SEA, that description reinforces that the Environmental Report compares alternative legal mechanisms for implementing substantially the same standards rather than substantively different planning standards capable of producing different environmental outcomes.

The central issue presently before the Court of Justice of the European Union in *McDonald and Others* likewise concerns the binding Specific Planning Policy Requirements contained within the Apartment Guidelines rather than the non-binding guidance text. In the order for reference, the High Court characterised the relevant SPPRs as binding legal requirements that affect the number of housing units within a development, its internal features and, consequentially, aspects of its external appearance. The Court further recorded that those SPPRs operate in preference to conflicting provisions of adopted development plans that were themselves subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. The questions referred to the Court of Justice therefore proceed on the basis that substantial issues arise as to whether binding apartment-design standards of this nature constitute a framework for future development consent within the meaning of Article 3(2)(a) of Directive 2001/42/EC and, if not, whether their derogation from SEA-assessed development plans nevertheless engages the requirements of the Directive. Those proceedings reinforce the significance of assessing genuine alternatives to the substantive standards themselves rather than limiting the alternatives assessment to different legal mechanisms for implementing the same standards.

The Department's decision not to assess the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments 2023 is particularly striking in this context. The omission of the 2023 Guidelines is particularly

significant because they constituted a complete and operational national apartment-design regime governing the same subject matter as the Draft NPS. Unlike a hypothetical alternative requiring new policy development, the 2023 Guidelines were a readily identifiable and previously implemented standards framework. Their assessment would have enabled a direct comparison between two nationally applicable apartment-design regimes differing in a range of substantive standards including apartment mix, minimum floor areas, dual-aspect provision, communal facilities, childcare assessment and internal density controls. In SEA terms, they represented the most practical and evidence-based alternative available to the Department and therefore warranted express consideration within the alternatives assessment.

One of the central questions referred to the Court of Justice is whether binding apartment-design standards that affect matters such as unit numbers, internal design characteristics and consequential aspects of a development's external appearance constitute a framework for future development consent within the meaning of Article 3(2)(a) of Directive 2001/42/EC. The 2023 Guidelines represented the most obvious and immediately available comparator against which the environmental implications of different apartment-design standards could have been evaluated. Their omission from the alternatives assessment therefore excludes comparison with the very type of alternative standards whose legal and environmental significance lies at the centre of the issues presently before the Court of Justice.

## **2. Failure to Facilitate Meaningful Public Participation**

The purpose of Strategic Environmental Assessment extends beyond the preparation of technical environmental documentation. The SEA process is also intended to facilitate meaningful public participation at a stage when genuine strategic options remain under consideration.

The alternatives assessment contained in the Environmental Report substantially limits the ability of consultees to participate meaningfully in the evaluation of policy choices. The two alternatives assessed both assume continuation of the substantive content of the 2025 apartment standards and differ principally in the legal mechanism through which those standards are implemented. As a result, consultees are not afforded an opportunity to comment upon substantively different apartment standards, despite the Department's own evidence demonstrating that such alternatives were identified, analysed and modelled during policy development.

Meaningful public participation requires that consultees be informed of and permitted to comment upon genuine strategic choices. Where substantive policy decisions have effectively been made before consultation commences, participation risks becoming confined to implementation details rather than the evaluation of alternative policy approaches.

By restricting the alternatives assessment to two versions of substantially the same standards, the Environmental Report does not provide a meaningful basis upon which the public can evaluate the environmental implications of different policy options. The absence of genuine alternatives therefore has implications not only for compliance with Annex I(h), but also for the broader participatory objectives underlying Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The importance of meaningful participation in the evaluation of strategic alternatives is also reflected in the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (the Kyiv Protocol), both of which

emphasise public participation at a stage when options remain genuinely open. The central purpose of such participation is to ensure that environmental considerations are capable of influencing policy choices before decisions are effectively fixed. Where the alternatives assessment is confined to different implementation mechanisms for substantially the same standards, consultees are deprived of a meaningful opportunity to comment upon the environmental implications of competing policy choices. The limitation of the alternatives assessment therefore has implications not only for compliance with Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive but also for the participatory objectives that underpin Strategic Environmental Assessment.

### **3. Absence of Environmental Alternatives**

The Draft NPS regulates matters including:

- apartment mix;
- minimum apartment floor areas;
- dual-aspect requirements;
- floor-to-ceiling heights;
- lift and core ratios;
- communal, community and cultural facilities;
- student accommodation standards.

No alternative options were assessed regarding any of these substantive standards. For example, the SEA does not evaluate:

- retention of previous apartment standards;
- alternative minimum floor areas;
- alternative dual-aspect percentages;
- alternative requirements for communal facilities;
- alternative approaches to apartment mix;
- geographically differentiated standards;
- standards informed by local housing need and demand assessments.

Instead, the Report assumes the substantive content of the 2025 standards and limits assessment to whether they should continue through a different statutory instrument.

This does not satisfy the requirement to evaluate reasonable alternatives capable of achieving the objectives of the plan while producing different environmental effects.

The Report also fails to assess alternatives arising from concerns identified in recent litigation regarding apartment standards and national planning policy. Those proceedings raised substantive questions concerning the relationship between national apartment standards, local authority planning functions, environmental assessment, housing need and the extent of planning discretion available in responding to local circumstances. The existence of such issues demonstrates that alternative policy approaches were reasonably available and warranted assessment through the SEA process.

In particular, no consideration appears to have been given to whether alternative standards, or greater local flexibility in their application, could better reconcile national policy objectives with the statutory functions of planning authorities. The Draft NPS is intended to operate as a binding national policy statement and may further reduce the discretion available to planning authorities when assessing apartment developments in light of local circumstances. No alternative approach examining a different balance between national consistency and local decision-making was assessed.

Furthermore, the SEA does not appear to assess the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments 2023 as a substantive alternative to the Draft NPS. The 2023 Guidelines constituted the most recent nationally applicable apartment-design regime in force immediately prior to the 2025 standards and therefore represented a reasonable and readily available alternative assessment required by Annex I(h). Instead, the alternatives assessment focuses primarily on the continuation of the 2025 standards and their reissue through a different statutory mechanism. This approach substantially narrows the scope of the alternatives assessment and excludes comparison with a materially different standards regime capable of producing different environmental and social outcomes.

Table 1. Comparison of the Substantive Planning Standards

Standard	2023 Guidelines	2025 Guidelines / Draft 2026 NPS
<b>Studio apartment (1 person)</b>	37 m <sup>2</sup>	32 m <sup>2</sup>
<b>1-bedroom apartment (2 persons)</b>	45 m <sup>2</sup>	45 m <sup>2</sup>
<b>2-bedroom apartment (3 persons)</b>	63 m <sup>2</sup> (primarily social housing/older persons)	63 m <sup>2</sup> (standard apartment type)
<b>2-bedroom apartment (4 persons)</b>	73 m <sup>2</sup>	73 m <sup>2</sup>
<b>3-bedroom apartment (4 persons)</b>	Not provided as a standard category	76 m <sup>2</sup>
<b>3-bedroom apartment (5 persons)</b>	90 m <sup>2</sup>	90 m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Dual-aspect apartments</b>	Minimum 33% in central/accessible locations; 50% objective elsewhere	Minimum 25% generally
<b>Apartments exceeding minimum size by 10%</b>	Majority (>50%) of apartments in schemes of 10+ units	25% of apartments
<b>Apartment mix controls</b>	Maximum 50% studios/one-beds and maximum 20–25% studios unless justified by HNDA	National apartment mix caps removed; no equivalent national minimum/maximum mix restrictions
<b>Maximum apartments per stair/lift core</b>	12 apartments per floor per core	No maximum requirement
<b>Ground-floor / Floor-to-ceiling height</b>	Minimum 2.7 m / Generally, 2.4 m	Minimum 2.7 m / Generally, 2.4 m
<b>Community facilities</b>	Community, meeting rooms, childcare and other facilities could be sought through the planning process, subject to agreement with the applicant	Reduced scope for planning authorities to require community/cultural facilities compared with 2023 approach.
<b>Childcare provision</b>	Assessed having regard to scale, unit mix and local need	More flexible approach with reduced reliance on one-bed and studio units for childcare calculations
<b>Build-to-Rent (BTR)</b>	BTR no longer had separate apartment design standards after the 2022/2023 amendment, but transitional arrangements remained	No separate BTR standards
<b>Shared accommodation / co-living</b>	Presumption against co-living unless justified through HNDA process (SPPR 7)	Co-living removed; chapter instead addresses purpose-built student accommodation,

The comparison demonstrates that the 2023 Guidelines constituted a materially different and immediately available planning alternative to the Draft NPS. The significance of those differences extends beyond the design of individual apartments. National, regional and local planning frameworks, including the National Planning Framework, Housing Growth Requirement Guidelines, housing strategies and development plans, rely upon assumptions regarding household size, population growth, residential density and infrastructure capacity. Where alternative apartment standards produce materially different occupancy outcomes within developments of similar scale, they are capable of influencing the amount of land required to accommodate projected population growth, the distribution of population within settlements and the efficiency with which existing infrastructure is utilised. The Environmental Report does not assess whether the Draft NPS is consistent with these underlying planning assumptions, nor does it evaluate whether alternative apartment standards might perform differently in relation to compact-growth objectives, land-use efficiency and infrastructure planning.

The environmental significance of those differences is reinforced by the Department's own modelling, which assessed how alternative standards affected both dwelling yield and bedspace capacity. The significance of that modelling extends beyond development yield. The appendices identify examples in which standards capable of increasing the number of apartments may simultaneously reduce aggregate population-accommodation capacity. This distinction is important because planning frameworks, infrastructure strategies and compact-growth policies are ultimately concerned with the accommodation of people rather than the production of units. Where a standards regime generates more dwellings but accommodates fewer residents within developments of comparable scale, additional residential development, land and infrastructure may be required elsewhere to accommodate the same population. The Environmental Report does not assess these potential differences despite their direct relevance to land-use efficiency, infrastructure planning, settlement strategy, resource use, emissions, and other sustainable development objectives. Appendix 5 includes worked examples demonstrating that a development accommodating approximately 275 persons under the 2023 standards may accommodate approximately 178 persons under a 2025 standards configuration while retaining a broadly similar physical scale. This represents a reduction in accommodation capacity of approximately 35% within a development of broadly equivalent scale. The examples further identify corresponding changes in embodied carbon per occupant, infrastructure utilisation and resource consumption. These are quantified planning and environmental differences rather than purely theoretical possibilities. Those examples illustrate how alternative standards may generate different population, infrastructure and land-use outcomes. A change that increases the number of units while reducing aggregate accommodation capacity is capable of influencing assumptions relating to population growth, household formation, infrastructure planning and land-use efficiency. These are not merely commercial or development-management outcomes but matters directly relevant to environmental assessment. The environmental relevance of those differences arises because planning frameworks allocate land, infrastructure and services by reference to projected population rather than dwelling numbers alone. Where standards increase dwelling yield while reducing the number of people accommodated within developments of similar scale, additional land, infrastructure and construction activity may be required elsewhere to accommodate equivalent population growth. The distinction between dwelling production and population-accommodation capacity is therefore central to the environmental assessment of reasonable alternatives. The existence of quantified differences in

population-accommodation capacity further demonstrates that the alternatives were environmentally distinguishable and therefore required assessment through the SEA process.

Numerous nationally applicable standards, including apartment floor areas, apartment mix, dual-aspect requirements, apartments per stair/lift core, communal facilities, childcare methodology and student accommodation, were materially altered. These changes were capable of producing different outcomes in relation to occupancy, density, infrastructure demand, housing quality and resource use.

Table 2. Potential Environmental Relevance of the Principal Changes to Apartment Standards

Planning Standard	2023 Guidelines	2025 Guidelines / Draft 2026 NPS	Potential Environmental Relevance
<b>Apartment floor areas</b>	Studio 37 m <sup>2</sup> ; 1-bed 45 m <sup>2</sup> ; 2-bed (3-person) 63 m <sup>2</sup> (limited circumstances); 2-bed (4-person) 73 m <sup>2</sup> ; 3-bed (5-person) 90 m <sup>2</sup>	Studio 32 m <sup>2</sup> ; 1-bed 45 m <sup>2</sup> ; 2-bed (3-person) 63 m <sup>2</sup> (standard type); 2-bed (4-person) 73 m <sup>2</sup> ; 3-bed (4-person) 76 m <sup>2</sup> ; 3-bed (5-person) 90 m <sup>2</sup>	Occupancy capacity, resource use, infrastructure demand, housing quality, embodied carbon per occupant
<b>Apartment mix</b>	National limits on studios and one-bedroom apartments linked to Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA)	National apartment mix limits removed	Population composition, community balance, childcare demand, long-term housing flexibility, embodied carbon per occupant
<b>Dual-aspect apartments</b>	Minimum 33% in central/ accessible locations; 50% objective elsewhere	Minimum 25%	Daylight, natural ventilation, overheating resilience, indoor environmental quality
<b>Apartments exceeding minimum floor area</b>	Majority (>50%) of apartments in schemes of 10+ units to exceed minimum sizes by 10%	Minimum 25% of apartments	Residential amenity, adaptability, quality of life
<b>Apartments per stair/lift core</b>	Maximum 12 apartments per floor per core	No national maximum	Building density, circulation, residential intensity, internal environment
<b>Community facilities</b>	Planning authorities could seek community, meeting, childcare and related facilities through the planning process	Reduced scope for requiring community/cultural facilities under apartment standards	Social cohesion, access to services, community infrastructure
<b>Childcare provision</b>	Childcare assessment linked to development scale, apartment mix and local need	Revised methodology with reduced reliance on studio and one-bedroom apartments for demand calculations	Childcare provision, local services, sustainable communities
<b>Purpose-Built Student Accommodation</b>	No dedicated standards	Dedicated student accommodation standards introduced	Population density, local services, infrastructure demand
<b>Ground-floor floor-to-ceiling height</b>	Minimum 2.7 m	Minimum 2.7 m	No substantive change

The comparison above demonstrates that the 2023 Guidelines constituted a materially different and immediately available policy alternative to the Draft NPS. While certain standards, such as ground-floor floor-to-ceiling height and the removal of separate Build-to-Rent standards, remained substantially unchanged, numerous other nationally applicable standards, including apartment floor areas, apartment mix controls, dual-aspect requirements, oversized apartment provision, stair/lift core ratios, community facilities, childcare assessment and the introduction of purpose-built student accommodation standards, were materially altered. Those changes were capable of producing different outcomes in relation to occupancy, infrastructure demand, resource efficiency, housing quality, daylighting, overheating resilience, social cohesion and other environmental considerations. The 2023 Guidelines therefore represented an environmentally distinct and reasonable alternative requiring assessment under Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive.

The existence of materially different and readily identifiable alternatives is further demonstrated by the Department's own internal analyses and briefing material released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Table 3. Internal Departmental Evidence Demonstrating Materially Different Policy Alternatives

Standard	2023 position	2025 / Draft 2026 position	FOI evidence of material effect
<b>Apartment mix</b>	Mix controls applied	National mix caps removed	Department modelled 20–80% more units depending on mix, with possible reduction in bedspaces.
<b>Studio size</b>	37 m <sup>2</sup>	32 m <sup>2</sup>	Internal email noted international studio standards often around 35–40 m <sup>2</sup> ; Department chose modularity argument.
<b>2-bed/3-person units</b>	Limited/capped	Restriction removed	Briefing identifies removal of restriction as a proposed amendment.
<b>Oversized units</b>	>50% exceed minimum by 10%	25% exceed minimum by 10%	Worked examples use this to increase unit yield / reduce floorspace.
<b>Apartments per Lift/Stair cores</b>	Max 12 per core	No national maximum	Department said fewer cores would likely increase yield further.
<b>Private open space</b>	Generally, 100% balconies/private amenity	Up to 50% may be reduced in certain circumstances	Briefing identifies this as a principal change.
<b>Community/cultural facilities</b>	Could be required/sought	Local extra requirements precluded	Briefing refers to preventing local authorities imposing requirements such as 5% extra floorspace.
<b>Purpose-Built Student Accommodation</b>	No equivalent dedicated standards	New PBSA flexibility	Briefing identifies no en-suite requirement and flexible kitchen/dining aggregate standards.

Table 3 demonstrates that the Department identified, analysed and quantified materially different apartment standards during preparation of the Draft NPS. Those analyses showed that alternative standards could produce materially different outcomes in relation to unit yield, bedspace capacity, floorspace and development intensity. The Department's own evidence therefore establishes the existence of reasonable alternatives. The issue raised in this submission is not whether alternatives existed, but whether alternatives identified during policy development were evaluated through the SEA process in accordance with Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive.

The contrast between the Department's internal policy-development process and the alternatives assessment presented in the Environmental Report is notable. Internal analyses examined alternative standards and quantified their implications for dwelling yield, bedspace capacity, floorspace and development intensity. By contrast, the alternatives assessment presented to consultees compares only the continuation of the 2025 standards with their implementation through a National Planning Statement. The alternatives assessed through SEA therefore appear significantly narrower than the range of alternatives considered during policy development.

The Department may contend that the standards themselves do not generate environmental effects because environmental consequences arise from zoning decisions, development plans or project-level assessments rather than from apartment design standards. However, the Department's own analyses demonstrate that alternative standards produce materially different outcomes in relation to dwelling numbers, bedspace capacity, floorspace and development intensity. Those variables are not merely development metrics; they directly influence population-accommodation capacity, land-use efficiency, infrastructure demand, resource consumption and urban density, all of which fall within the scope of Strategic Environmental Assessment. The significance of the Department's modelling is not merely that different outcomes were possible, but that the Department itself identified, quantified and compared those outcomes during policy development. The modelling further demonstrates that alternative standards may alter population-accommodation capacity and occupancy patterns, while the appendices identify multiple pathways through which those changes may influence environmental factors including infrastructure demand, resource use, housing quality, daylight and ventilation, overheating resilience, accessibility, childcare provision, community infrastructure, health and wellbeing and social cohesion. Whether such effects ultimately meet the threshold of significance for SEA purposes is not the issue. Their existence demonstrates that the alternatives considered during policy development were environmentally distinguishable and therefore warranted assessment under Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive. This is therefore not a case in which the existence of reasonable alternatives is uncertain; rather, the Department's own evidence demonstrates that materially different alternatives formed part of the policy-development process but were not evaluated through the SEA despite being recognised as capable of producing materially different planning and environmental outcomes.

The Department's internal briefing material also examined apartment standards across a range of jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Australia. Officials recognised that direct comparison was not always possible because many jurisdictions regulate housing through differing legal and technical frameworks. Nevertheless, the documents demonstrate that alternative regulatory approaches were actively considered during policy development.

The materials further indicate that a number of standards ultimately adopted in Ireland are less demanding than standards identified in several comparator jurisdictions. For example, the Department noted that Ireland's previous minimum studio standard of 37 m<sup>2</sup> was broadly comparable with standards identified in the United Kingdom (37 m<sup>2</sup>), Lisbon (35 m<sup>2</sup>), Barcelona (36 m<sup>2</sup>), and the 35–40 m<sup>2</sup> range observed elsewhere internationally, while Copenhagen required a minimum dwelling size of 40 m<sup>2</sup>. The revised Irish standard reduced the minimum studio size to 32 m<sup>2</sup>, below each of those identified comparators. Similarly, the Department's analysis recorded a minimum one-bedroom standard of 50 m<sup>2</sup> in the United Kingdom compared with the Irish minimum of 45 m<sup>2</sup>.

These comparisons are not relied upon to suggest that any particular international standard should have been adopted. Rather, they demonstrate that identifiable and materially different regulatory approaches were available and actively considered during policy development before the standards ultimately adopted were selected.

The inadequacy of the alternatives assessment is further demonstrated by the fact that a number of substantive changes introduced by the Draft NPS, including changes to apartment mix, apartment sizes, dual-aspect requirements, amenity provision, communal facilities, childcare methodology and student accommodation standards, are capable of producing materially different environmental outcomes. Table 2 identifies a range of environmental pathways through which those differences may be relevant, while the appendices provide detailed technical assessment of their potential implications.

In particular, the Draft NPS itself recognises that standards relating to apartment size, dual-aspect provision and floor-to-ceiling height influence matters such as daylight availability, ventilation and residential amenity. The appendices identify potential differences in outcomes relating to overheating resilience, indoor environmental quality, energy performance, population accommodation, infrastructure demand, accessibility, health and wellbeing, social cohesion and resource efficiency.

Whether such effects ultimately meet the threshold of significance for SEA purposes is not the issue. Their existence demonstrates that materially different environmental outcomes were capable of arising from alternative standards and that the 2023 Guidelines therefore constituted an environmentally distinct and reasonable alternative requiring assessment under Annex I(h) of the SEA Directive.

The Environmental Report also does not assess the implications of different apartment standards for resource efficiency and climate-related outcomes. The appendices further identify circumstances in which materially different occupancy outcomes may alter environmental performance when assessed on a per-occupant basis rather than a per-dwelling basis. These include embodied carbon, construction-material consumption, infrastructure utilisation and operational building performance. Where similar quantities of resources are used to accommodate fewer residents, environmental impacts per occupant may differ materially. The Environmental Report contains no comparative assessment of these issues despite their direct relevance to climate-transition objectives, resource efficiency and the prudent use of natural resources. The evidence contained within the appendices identifies pathways through which different occupancy outcomes may alter embodied carbon per occupant, construction-material requirements, infrastructure demand, operational energy use and overall land consumption associated with accommodating projected population growth. Where materially different apartment standards are capable of accommodating materially different numbers of people within developments of similar physical scale,

the potential consequences extend beyond housing design and into matters directly relevant to sustainable development, prudent use of natural resources and climate-transition objectives. No meaningful comparison of those implications appears within the alternatives assessment.

The Environmental Report also provides limited assessment of the environmental baseline against which the consequences of alternative apartment standards might properly be evaluated. The appendices identify a number of matters capable of informing that baseline, including occupancy patterns, population-accommodation capacity, childcare provision, community infrastructure, overheating resilience, accessibility, housing quality, residential amenity and resource efficiency. To the extent that alternative standards may influence those matters, a meaningful assessment of alternatives requires a clear understanding of the conditions and assumptions against which their environmental consequences are to be measured. The omission of such analysis further limits the ability of the SEA to compare the environmental implications of competing standards in a transparent and evidence-based manner.

The SEA also fails to assess whether the Draft NPS is consistent with the assumptions that underpin existing national, regional and local planning frameworks.

The Environmental Report also fails to assess the extent to which the Draft NPS modifies, displaces or overrides environmental assumptions previously assessed through Strategic Environmental Assessment processes undertaken for development plans and other planning instruments. Local authority development plans are prepared having regard to local environmental, infrastructural and demographic circumstances and are themselves subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. Many such plans contain provisions relating to apartment mix, residential amenity, childcare provision, community infrastructure, housing quality and other matters directly affected by the Draft NPS.

The Draft NPS is intended to operate as a binding national planning statement and therefore has the potential to alter the practical operation of planning policies that were previously evaluated through SEA processes at local and regional level. However, the Environmental Report does not assess whether replacing locally responsive standards with nationally uniform standards may alter environmental assumptions relied upon in those earlier assessments. Nor does it evaluate whether alternative approaches preserving a greater degree of local flexibility would produce different environmental outcomes.

This omission is particularly significant because the proposed standards do not operate in isolation. They interact with, and in some instances may displace or supersede, planning standards embedded within SEA-assessed development plans. The Environmental Report likewise appears to contain little or no assessment of cumulative effects arising from the interaction of the Draft NPS with other elements of the planning framework, including the National Planning Framework, Housing Growth Requirement Guidelines, Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines, Building Height Guidelines and local authority development plans. The environmental consequences of apartment standards may arise not solely from the standards themselves but from their interaction with these related planning instruments. If alternative apartment standards influence occupancy, density, infrastructure demand, community provision, resource use or land requirements, those effects are capable of being cumulative when combined with wider planning policies. No meaningful assessment of such cumulative interactions appears to have been undertaken. The Environmental Report therefore does not assess

whether implementation of the Draft NPS may modify the environmental outcomes previously anticipated when those plans were adopted.

Nor does the Environmental Report identify which assumptions previously relied upon in development-plan SEA processes may be altered by the Draft NPS. In the absence of such assessment, it is not possible to determine whether nationally uniform apartment standards may affect previously assessed expectations relating to population capacity, infrastructure demand, community facilities, housing mix, land-use efficiency or other environmental considerations that informed adoption of those plans.

The SEA does not assess alternatives informed by locally identified housing need. Nor does the Environmental Report assess whether alternative apartment standards may influence the provision of childcare facilities, children's play space, community infrastructure or other facilities that contribute to sustainable neighbourhoods. The appendices identify a number of mechanisms through which changes to apartment mix, occupancy characteristics and communal-space requirements may affect the circumstances in which such facilities are delivered. These matters are directly relevant to social cohesion, quality of life, community wellbeing and access to services, yet no alternative standards appear to have been evaluated against those outcomes. Government housing policy increasingly relies upon local authority assessment of housing requirements and housing mix through statutory housing-delivery processes. If differing housing needs may arise across local authority areas, then alternatives allowing apartment standards to respond to those differing circumstances constituted potentially reasonable alternatives for assessment. No such alternatives appear to have been evaluated.

This is particularly important because local authority development plans are prepared on the basis of assumptions regarding housing mix, population growth, infrastructure capacity, childcare provision, community facilities and residential amenity and are themselves subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. To the extent that the Draft NPS may alter or override standards that informed those assumptions, a question arises as to whether environmental outcomes previously anticipated through local plan-making processes remain valid. The Environmental Report does not evaluate this interaction nor examine alternatives that would preserve a greater degree of local responsiveness while maintaining national policy objectives.

The SEA does not assess whether the proposed standards are consistent with national climate-adaptation policy. The Environmental Report likewise does not assess whether alternative apartment standards would perform differently in relation to accessibility, adaptability and ageing-in-place objectives. Apartment floor area, internal layout, storage provision, circulation space, communal facilities and student-accommodation standards may influence the suitability of residential accommodation for older persons, persons with disabilities and persons whose mobility needs change over time. They may also affect the capacity of housing stock to support ageing in place, universal-design objectives and long-term adaptability without future alteration or retrofit. These matters are directly relevant to Strategic Environmental Objectives concerning health, wellbeing, social inclusion and quality of life, yet no comparison of alternative standards appears to have been undertaken. The omission is particularly notable given that the Draft NPS regulates matters that are commonly recognised as influencing overheating risk and passive environmental performance within residential buildings. Apartment size, dual-aspect provision, access to natural ventilation, solar exposure and internal amenity arrangements may all affect the capacity of dwellings to remain comfortable under future climatic conditions.

Assessment of reasonable alternatives could therefore have considered whether different standards performed differently in relation to climate-adaptation objectives, overheating resilience and future energy demand associated with cooling.

The increasing frequency and severity of heat events are now widely recognised within national and European climate policy. The Draft NPS includes changes to standards governing matters such as apartment size, dual-aspect provision, balconies, daylight access and ventilation, all of which may influence overheating resilience and indoor environmental conditions. No assessment is undertaken of whether these changes may affect the capacity of future housing stock to adapt to projected climate conditions, nor whether any resulting costs may be transferred to occupants, public-health systems or future retrofit programmes. The technical assessments contained within the appendices identify pathways through which reductions in apartment size, reductions in dual-aspect provision and changes in internal spatial arrangements may affect overheating risk, cooling demand, daylight availability, natural ventilation and indoor environmental quality. The appendices further identify circumstances in which smaller apartments are more likely to require mitigation measures and increased operational energy consumption in order to maintain acceptable internal environmental conditions.

This is particularly important where apartment standards influence long-term characteristics of the housing stock, including overheating resilience, accessibility, adaptability and indoor environmental quality. Assessment of reasonable alternatives provides an opportunity to identify and avoid adverse environmental and health effects before they become embedded within future residential development.

#### **4. Failure to Assess Consistency With Existing SEA-Assessed Population, Housing and Land-Use Assumptions**

National, regional and local planning frameworks rely upon assumptions concerning population growth, household formation, average household size, housing mix, land requirements and infrastructure capacity. The appendices identify that these assumptions underpin the National Planning Framework, Housing Growth Requirement Guidelines, housing strategies and development plans and are used to calculate both dwelling requirements and the quantity of land required to accommodate projected population growth.

Under previous standards, apartment mix requirements formed part of the mechanism through which those assumptions were implemented. The removal of apartment mix controls, together with changes to minimum apartment sizes and occupancy characteristics, may alter population-accommodation capacity within developments of equivalent scale. The appendices identify examples in which developments containing substantially more apartments may nevertheless accommodate materially fewer people.

The Environmental Report does not evaluate whether the Draft NPS remains consistent with the demographic, housing and land-use assumptions previously assessed through SEA processes, nor does it assess whether alternative standards would perform differently in relation to those assumptions. This omission is particularly significant because spatial planning frameworks are ultimately concerned with accommodating people rather than merely producing housing units.

The significance of this issue extends beyond housing design. Where alternative apartment standards produce materially different population-accommodation outcomes, they are capable of altering

assumptions relating to land requirements, infrastructure planning, compact growth and sustainable development that underpin SEA-assessed planning frameworks.

## **5. Failure to Explain Rejection of Alternatives**

Even if the Department considered that alternatives such as retention of the 2023 Guidelines, locally differentiated standards, alternative apartment mix controls, alternative dual-aspect requirements or alternative amenity standards should ultimately not be adopted, the Environmental Report does not adequately explain why those alternatives were rejected.

The Department's own internal analyses demonstrate that a range of materially different policy options were identified and assessed during preparation of the Draft NPS. Those materials demonstrate not only that alternatives existed, but that the Department undertook quantitative analysis of their consequences for unit yield, bedspace capacity, floorspace and development intensity before selecting the preferred approach. However, those alternatives do not appear to be described within the Environmental Report, nor does the Report explain why they were excluded from the alternatives assessment. In particular, the Environmental Report does not explain why the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments 2023 were not considered a reasonable alternative despite representing the immediately preceding nationally applicable apartment-design regime and the most obvious comparator against which the environmental implications of the 2025 standards could have been evaluated.

The absence of any transparent explanation for the rejection of alternatives prevents consultees from understanding how environmental considerations informed the selection of the preferred approach. This omission is especially difficult to reconcile with the documentary record released under the Freedom of Information Act. Those materials demonstrate that alternative standards were not merely identified but were subjected to quantitative analysis and comparison during policy development. Where alternatives have already been developed, modelled and evaluated internally, the SEA process would ordinarily be expected to explain why they were discounted and why the preferred approach was selected having regard to environmental considerations. No such explanation appears in the Environmental Report. It also frustrates meaningful public participation by denying consultees the opportunity to comment upon the reasoning that led to exclusion of alternative policy options.

The result is not merely an absence of alternatives assessment, but an absence of transparency in the decision-making process by which those alternatives were discarded.

## 6. Internal Inconsistency in the SEA

The SEA repeatedly states that:

"No likely significant positive environmental effect has been introduced by the draft NPS."

and

"No potential likely significant negative environmental effect has been introduced by the draft NPS."

The Environmental Report further concludes that environmental effects arise from the wider planning framework rather than from the apartment standards themselves.

However, the Draft NPS establishes nationally applicable and binding standards governing apartment design, apartment composition, residential accommodation, communal facilities and student accommodation. These standards directly influence the size, occupancy, density, amenity and spatial characteristics of residential development. The Department's own policy-development materials likewise recognise that changes to apartment standards may alter dwelling numbers, occupancy patterns, bedspace provision and development intensity. If alternative standards are capable of producing different outcomes in relation to those planning variables, it follows that they are capable of producing different environmental consequences. The Department's own evidence demonstrates not merely the existence of alternative outcomes but the existence of quantified differences. Internal modelling identified changes in unit yield, bedspace capacity and development intensity. The appendices further identify quantified differences in population-accommodation capacity, embodied carbon per occupant and infrastructure utilisation. In those circumstances, the proposition that the standards themselves introduce neither positive nor negative environmental effects requires detailed explanation if it is to be reconciled with the evidence before the Department.

The Draft NPS also affects the extent to which planning authorities may respond to local environmental, infrastructural and housing circumstances through their development plans and development-management functions. Local authority development plans are prepared having regard to local conditions and are themselves subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. The Environmental Report does not assess whether replacing locally responsive standards with nationally uniform and binding standards may influence environmental outcomes in different locations, nor does it assess alternative approaches that would preserve a greater degree of local flexibility. If differing environmental, infrastructural and housing circumstances justify local assessment and SEA at development-plan level, it is not self-evident that the environmental consequences of reducing that local discretion can simply be treated as neutral.

The proposition that the standards are environmentally neutral is difficult to reconcile with both the Draft NPS and the evidence submitted to this consultation. The proposition is also difficult to reconcile with the stated rationale for introducing the Draft NPS. The policy is advanced on the basis that the standards will materially influence development outcomes, housing delivery and development capacity. The Department's own modelling similarly identifies changes in dwelling yield, bedspace provision and development intensity arising from different standards. If the standards are capable of materially affecting planning outcomes and residential-development patterns, a fuller explanation is required as to why those same changes are regarded as incapable of producing environmentally relevant effects. In the absence of

such explanation, the conclusion that no likely significant environmental effects arise appears insufficiently reasoned. The appendices identify a range of environmental considerations capable of arising from the standards, including changes in occupancy density, residential land requirements, infrastructure demand, embodied carbon per occupant, childcare provision, communal facilities, accessibility, ageing in place, social connectedness, health and wellbeing, residential amenity, resource efficiency and community cohesion. These matters extend beyond the individual dwelling and are capable of influencing wider planning objectives relating to compact growth, infrastructure provision, land-use efficiency and quality of life.

The Draft NPS itself acknowledges that certain standards influence matters directly related to environmental performance and residential conditions. In particular, it recognises that dual-aspect provision affects daylight and ventilation and that floor-to-ceiling height influences sunlight, daylight and ventilation. The technical evidence contained in the appendices further identifies potential effects relating to overheating resilience, indoor environmental quality, daylighting performance, cooling demand, energy use, operational carbon emissions and global warming potential. The Department's own analyses demonstrate that alternative standards may also produce materially different outcomes in relation to dwelling numbers, occupancy capacity, bedspace provision, floorspace and development intensity.

These findings sit uneasily alongside the SEA's conclusion that no likely significant environmental effects arise from the standards. The issue raised by this submission is not merely the conclusion reached by the Environmental Report, but the absence of a clear explanatory assessment connecting that conclusion to the evidence before the Department. The Environmental Report identifies standards capable of influencing matters including daylight, ventilation, residential amenity, occupancy patterns, infrastructure demand and resource use, yet concludes that no likely significant environmental effects arise. Where multiple environmental pathways have been identified, both within the Draft NPS itself and in the evidence submitted to this consultation, a reasoned explanation is required as to why those pathways were considered incapable of resulting in likely significant environmental effects. In the absence of such analysis, consultees are unable to understand, test or comment meaningfully upon the basis of the Department's conclusion.

Having elected to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment, the Department was required to provide a transparent, reasoned and evidence-based assessment of the environmental consequences of the standards and of the alternatives available to it. The Department's own modelling and the expert assessments contained in the appendices identify multiple pathways through which the standards are capable of affecting daylighting, ventilation, overheating resilience, indoor environmental quality, energy demand, infrastructure demand, resource use, population-accommodation capacity, human health and other environmental factors. The appendices further identify evidence that these effects may be significant, both individually and cumulatively. In those circumstances, the Environmental Report was required to assess those effects transparently and to explain the basis upon which it concluded that no likely significant environmental effects would arise.

Accordingly, whether or not such effects ultimately meet the threshold of significance for SEA purposes, the existence of materially different environmental outcomes demonstrates that environmentally distinct alternatives were available for assessment and comparison under Article 5 and Annex I(h) of the SEA

Directive. Having elected to undertake SEA, the Department was required to comply with those procedural requirements irrespective of its ultimate conclusion regarding the significance of the effects.

## **7. Failure to Assess Performance Against Strategic Environmental Objectives**

The SEA states that Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) are used to evaluate the Draft NPS and the alternatives considered.

However, several of the SEOs include objectives relating to:

- protection of health and wellbeing;
- improvement of social cohesion;
- prudent use of natural resources;
- sustainable development and climate objectives.

The inclusion of these Strategic Environmental Objectives reflects an increasingly recognised principle that public policy should be assessed not solely by reference to quantitative outputs, but also by reference to human wellbeing, quality of life, social participation and environmental sustainability. These considerations are directly relevant to the assessment of alternative apartment standards.

The SEA does not meaningfully assess whether alternative approaches to apartment mix, apartment sizes, communal facilities, amenity provision or occupancy standards would perform differently against these objectives. Nor does it assess whether the proposed changes may adversely affect the achievement of these objectives. As noted in submissions to this consultation, changes to apartment occupancy, amenity provision, community infrastructure and resource consumption could reasonably be expected to have implications for health, wellbeing, social cohesion, resource efficiency and sustainable development.

The evidence contained in the appendices identifies a number of pathways through which alternative apartment standards may perform differently against Strategic Environmental Objectives. These include housing conditions associated with crowding and occupancy levels; access to daylight and natural ventilation; overheating resilience and indoor environmental quality; provision of communal facilities, childcare and play infrastructure; accessibility and adaptability for older persons and persons with disabilities; and factors influencing social connectedness, community cohesion and quality of life. These are matters directly relevant to Strategic Environmental Objectives concerning sustainable development, resource efficiency, climate resilience, human health, wellbeing, social cohesion and quality of life. The existence of these potential differences demonstrates that alternative apartment standards were capable of performing differently against the Strategic Environmental Objectives and should therefore have been assessed through comparison of reasonable alternatives.

The proposed standards are also capable of affecting the quality of residential environments and the equality of housing outcomes through changes to dwelling size, occupancy patterns, shared facilities, communal spaces and social infrastructure. The appendices identify potential implications for childcare provision, community facilities, accessibility, ageing in place, quality of life and community cohesion, all of which are capable of influencing performance against the Strategic Environmental Objectives. Whether such effects are ultimately assessed as positive, negative or neutral, they represent matters capable of

distinguishing one standards regime from another and therefore warranted comparative assessment through the SEA process.

Accordingly, the Environmental Report does not provide a meaningful basis for comparing how different policy choices might perform against the Strategic Environmental Objectives.

## **8. Failure to Monitor Environmental Effects**

The SEA monitoring framework does not appear to provide meaningful indicators for several of the environmental effects that the Draft NPS may generate. In particular, no provision appears to have been made for monitoring:

- changes in occupancy density and residential capacity;
- additional land and infrastructure requirements arising from lower occupancy outcomes;
- embodied carbon per occupant;
- cooling demand and overheating mitigation measures;
- changes in operational energy demand associated with overheating resilience;
- loss or reduction of childcare facilities and children's play space;
- accessibility and adaptability outcomes for older people and persons with disabilities;
- the provision or loss of community, cultural and communal facilities.

If the Draft NPS is capable of affecting these matters, then a corresponding monitoring framework is required to identify whether the anticipated environmental effects arise in practice. The absence of appropriate monitoring indicators further undermines confidence that the environmental consequences of the proposed standards have been adequately assessed.

## **9. Predetermination of Outcome**

Section 6.2 states that revocation of the 2025 Guidelines and preparation of alternative standards were not considered a reasonable option because of Government policy and because the Department had already decided to replace the Section 28 Guidelines with National Planning Statements.

This concern is reinforced by the fact that the legal questions referred by the High Court to the EU Court of Justice focus upon the environmental significance of the substantive SPPRs themselves. If those standards are capable of materially affecting development outcomes for the purposes of Article 3 of the SEA Directive, an alternatives assessment confined to the choice of legal instrument inevitably risks excluding the very policy choices capable of producing different environmental effects.

The consequence is that the SEA appears to have proceeded on the assumption that the substantive content of the 2025 apartment standards was fixed before the alternatives assessment commenced. If the substance of those standards was treated as predetermined, the alternatives assessment could only compare different mechanisms for implementing the same policy outcome rather than alternative policy approaches capable of producing different environmental effects. Such an approach undermines the central purpose of Strategic Environmental Assessment, namely to inform decision-making before substantive policy choices have been finalised.

This approach also appears to have excluded consideration of alternative policy models that would have afforded planning authorities greater flexibility in responding to local circumstances or environmental constraints. If such alternatives were excluded from consideration at the outset because the decision had already been taken to implement the standards through a binding National Planning Statement, then the reasonable alternatives assessment was necessarily constrained before it began.

The resulting alternatives assessment compares the continuation of:

- the 2025 standards; and
- essentially the same standards through a different statutory mechanism.

This significantly narrows the scope of alternatives considered and undermines the purpose of the SEA process as an assessment tool intended to influence plan-making before decisions are finalised.

Article 8 of Directive 2001/42/EC requires that the Environmental Report prepared pursuant to Article 5, together with the opinions expressed by environmental authorities and the public during consultation, be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its adoption. Strategic Environmental Assessment therefore requires environmental information and consultation responses to be capable of influencing the final decision-making process. If the substantive content of the apartment standards had already been fixed before the alternatives assessment commenced, there is a serious question as to whether environmental assessment and public participation were capable of influencing the formulation of the Draft NPS in any meaningful way.

Strategic Environmental Assessment is intended to ensure that environmental considerations and consultation responses are capable of influencing the substantive content of a plan or programme before that content is finally determined. Where the principal policy choices have effectively been fixed in advance of the alternatives assessment and consultation process, the capacity of SEA to perform that function is substantially reduced or entirely eliminated.

The Environmental Report gives rise to the appearance that the principal policy choice, retention of the substantive content of the 2025 standards, had already been made before the SEA process began. If so, the SEA process risks being retrospective justification of an already selected outcome rather than a mechanism through which environmental considerations inform policy formulation. Concerns of this nature were also expressed publicly during development of the standards. The Irish Planning Institute<sup>5</sup> described the revised standards and associated legislative proposals as having been presented as a "*fait accompli*" and expressed concern regarding the removal of apartment-mix requirements and the resulting implications for the plan-led system of development planning. While such concerns are not determinative of the legality of the SEA process, they reinforce the appearance that substantive policy choices may have been settled before the alternatives assessment and public consultation process commenced.

This concern is reinforced by the Department's own internal analyses demonstrating that materially different alternatives existed and were considered during policy development, yet do not appear within the alternatives assessment presented to the public.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://ipi.ie/2025/07/11/statement-on-revised-apartment-standards>

The concerns identified in this section are closely connected to the participatory purpose of Strategic Environmental Assessment. Where substantive policy choices have effectively been fixed before the alternatives assessment commences, meaningful public participation becomes impossible to achieve because consultees are not afforded a genuine opportunity to influence the selection of policy options. In such circumstances, consultation risks occurring only after the principal policy outcome has already been determined.

Furthermore, the SEA appears to proceed from the assumption that the substantive policy choices embodied in the 2025 standards were not open to reconsideration. If the standards were treated as fixed before the alternatives assessment commenced, the SEA process cannot be said to have genuinely informed the formulation of the plan. Rather, it appears to have assessed alternatives only after the substantive policy outcome had already been determined.

## **10. Requested Amendment**

We request that the Department revise the SEA and alternatives assessment to include genuine planning and environmental alternatives relating to the substantive apartment standards, including alternative approaches to:

- apartment size standards;
- apartment mix requirements;
- dual-aspect provision;
- community and communal facilities;
- standards for student accommodation;
- locally responsive standards based on settlement type and housing need.

The revised SEA should assess the implications of alternative standards for:

- land consumption and land-use efficiency;
- occupancy density, population capacity and compact-growth objectives;
- infrastructure demand and service provision;
- resource efficiency and embodied carbon;
- residential amenity, housing quality and quality of life;
- health, wellbeing and mental-health outcomes;
- accessibility, adaptability and ageing in place;
- childcare provision, children's play facilities and community infrastructure;
- social cohesion, social inclusion and equality of housing outcomes;
- daylight, ventilation, overheating resilience and indoor environmental quality; and
- consistency with the National Planning Framework and associated statutory plans.

That revised SEA and the final decision on this National Planning Statement should be informed by the analysis in the documents appended to this submission, all of which were already available to the Department at the time when the current SEA report was prepared.

The revised SEA should also include appropriate monitoring measures addressing:

- occupancy density and population outcomes;
- residential amenity and housing-quality outcomes;
- daylight, ventilation and overheating performance;
- embodied-carbon and resource-efficiency outcomes;
- childcare, community and communal-facility provision;
- accessibility and ageing-in-place outcomes; and
- health, wellbeing, social-isolation and community-cohesion outcomes.

The omission of such assessment and monitoring measures is particularly significant where the evidence submitted to this consultation identifies pathways through which the standards may affect environmental quality, physical health, mental wellbeing and social cohesion. Only through assessment of such alternatives can the SEA demonstrate compliance with the requirement to identify, describe and evaluate reasonable alternatives under the SEA Directive.

## 11. Supporting Appendices

This submission is accompanied by the following appendices, which form part of the submission and are relied upon in support of the matters raised above:

**Appendix 1: Professor Orla Hegarty** *BArch FRIAI RIBA Report – Apartment Guidelines (10 October 2025)*, including supporting appendices addressing apartment mix, land use, density, infrastructure demand, embodied carbon, climate impacts, health and wellbeing, childcare provision, community facilities, accessibility, and the interaction of the apartment standards with other national planning policies and SPPRs.

**Appendix 2: John Morehead** *B.Arch., Dip. Arch. Sc. Dip. Applied Project Management, Certified European Passive House Designer – Technical Assessment (14 October 2025)*, examining the technical and environmental implications of the apartment standards, including impacts relating to overheating risk, daylighting performance, indoor environmental quality, cooling demand, energy performance, global warming potential, dual-aspect provision, floor area reductions and ceiling-height reductions.

**Appendix 3: Dr James O’Connell**, *MB BCh BAO MPH MSc MD Adv. Dip (Planning & Environmental Law) – Potential Health Impacts of the Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025*, assessing the potential health implications of the standards through pathways including crowding, housing conditions, natural lighting, social isolation, loneliness and community cohesion and concluding that the standards are capable of giving rise to likely and potentially significant health effects requiring full assessment.

**Appendix 4: Robin Mandal** *B.Arch., M.Arch.Sc., FRIAI – Report on the Potential Impacts on Human Health of the Standards for Apartments Guidelines*, examining the relationship between apartment design standards, housing quality, residential amenity, population density, health and wellbeing, and concluding that reductions in apartment standards are capable of adversely affecting quality of life, health outcomes and the environmental quality of residential development.

**Appendix 5: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage** *documents released under the Freedom of Information Act*, comprising internal correspondence, worked examples and comparative analyses prepared during development of the Draft NPS, including records demonstrating assessment of alternative apartment standards and their effects on unit numbers, bedspace capacity and floorspace.

The Department is requested to consider this submission together with the evidence and analysis contained in the Appendices. To the extent that the appendices identify environmental effects, alternative policy approaches, technical constraints or planning considerations relevant to the Draft NPS and accompanying SEA, those matters are incorporated into and relied upon as part of this submission.

# Appendix 1

## **Report- 2025 Apartment Guidelines**

### **Orla Hegarty B.Arch FRIAI RIBA, 10 October 2025**

The purpose of this report is to describe the potential impacts of the 'Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025' in relation to Planning policy, environmental effects, resource demands, and also to address concerns about inadequate space, loss of amenity and facilities for children, and the overall potential negative consequences for occupant health and well-being, as a result of the new standards.

## **1.0 Background**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND – Section 28 Guidelines**

Under the 2000 Planning & Development Act<sup>1</sup>, the Minister had powers to issue 'guidelines' under Section 28, and 'directives' under Section 29 subject to *"the directive, amendment or revocation shall be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas and the policy directive shall not be issued, amended or revoked, as the case may be, until a resolution approving the issuing, amending or revocation of the policy directive has been passed by each House"*.

However, the 2015 Planning & Development Act<sup>2</sup> introduced an amendment to Section 28, to introduce *"specific planning policy requirements"* that *"are required to be applied by planning authorities and the Board in the performance of their functions."*, without being passed by each House of the Oireachtas.

Following this, Special Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) for apartment standards were first introduced in 2015<sup>3</sup>, and amended in 2018<sup>4</sup>, 2020<sup>5</sup> and again in 2023<sup>6</sup>. The new 2025 Apartment Guidelines revoke the 2023 Guidelines (and all preceding updates).<sup>7</sup> Refer to **[Appendix B]** for comparison between the 2023 and 2025 Guidelines.

In parallel, four SPPRs were issued in 2018 under the 'Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines'<sup>8</sup> and four under the 2024 'Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities'<sup>9</sup> and were subject of SEA Environmental Reports<sup>10</sup>. These guidelines have not been revoked, and therefore the SPPRs issued in 2018 and in 2024 must be read *in combination* with the new 2025 SPPRs. Refer to **[Appendix C]** for issues arising when read in combination.

Concerns have been raised about the new guidelines by the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) **[Appendix F]** and the Irish Planning Institute **[Appendix G]**.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND- Strategic Environmental Assessment**

The SEA Report for the 2024 'Compact Settlement Guidelines' refers to the context of the guidelines within the National Planning Framework (NPF), saying that: *"Compact growth that sees the renewal of existing settlements, rather than continued sprawl, is a key objective of the NPF in order to maximise quality of life, improve access to services, ensure more efficient use of land and allow for greater integration with existing infrastructure"* and that *"It was determined that the approach likely to result in the most positive effects on the environment, the economy and the health and wellbeing of the population would be a combination of the options Contained Growth and Reduced Sprawl"*.

The Report also refers to the 2021 ‘Housing for All’<sup>11</sup> government housing plan, objective that *“everybody should have access to sustainable, good quality housing to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard, and located close to essential services, offering a high quality of life”*, and says that *“Ireland’s Climate Action Plan 2023<sup>12</sup> sets the roadmap for taking decisive action to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050 at the latest”*.

Within the scope of this SEA Report, standards for density of housing (dwellings per hectare, dph), car parking and bicycle parking are assessed. The focus is on ‘sustainable densities’ from up to 100-300dph in urban areas of Dublin and Cork, to 25-40dph in suburban/ edge areas of towns. A current ‘average household size’ of 2.75 persons per dwelling nationally is included in the Report.

The National Planning Framework (NPF)<sup>13</sup> 2020-2040 was adopted by government in 2018, under provisions for strategic planning in the Planning & Development Act, 2000<sup>14</sup>. The purpose of the NPF is to *“set a new strategic planning and development context for Ireland and to provide a high level framework for the coordination of a range of national, regional and local authority policies and activities, planning and investment”*.

The NPF was subject to an Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)<sup>15</sup>, which states that *“The focus of the NPF is on sustainable land use planning for the next 20 years. At the broad level, implementation of the NPF is expected to bring environmental improvements, since it tackles specific environmental pressures arising from urban sprawl, one-off housing, land use change etc. The plan has potential for cumulative impacts and as might be anticipated the greatest cumulative benefit is anticipated to be in relation to Population and Human Health, as the objectives proposed emphasise coordinated spatial planning, balanced growth and consolidation/ densification of existing built-up areas, both urban and rural.”*

The National Policy Framework (NPF) was revised in 2025, with ‘National Policy Objective 42- to target the delivery of housing to accommodate approximately 50,000 additional homes per annum to 2040’. This is based on Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) forecasts of population growth and an assumption that between 2022 and 2040 the future ‘average household size’ will fall to 2.6 persons per dwelling<sup>16</sup>. The NPF has also been subject to an SEA Environmental Report, most recently revised in 2024.<sup>17</sup>

Housing targets from the NPF feed down to regional and local plans which are calculated on the basis of this ‘average household size’. The specification of specific ‘mix’ of apartment sizes in local authority development plans is determined in line with both national development targets and local demographic and other criteria.

The NPF SEA Report states that *“The compact growth policy approach of the NPF addresses the need for a more sustainable form of development in Ireland’s cities and towns in response to an identified need to counter the trend of urban sprawl, to support the targeted delivery of infrastructure services, to promote cities and towns to be self-sustaining and viable places to live and work. NPF National Policy Objectives 8 and 9 established a target to deliver at least half (50%) of all new homes that are targeted in the five Cities and suburbs”*.

The revised National Planning Framework (2025) says that the objective to *“deliver at least 40% of all new homes nationally, within the built-up footprint of existing settlements and ensure compact and sequential patterns of growth.”*<sup>18</sup>

In July 2025, 'NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements Guidelines for Planning Authorities issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended)<sup>19</sup> were issued, reiterating these objectives and directing that planning authorities *“should undertake a Settlement Capacity Audit to identify zoned serviced/serviceable lands with residential development potential in all relevant settlements, specifying enabling infrastructure, for example wastewater network or treatment infrastructure, energy infrastructure, roads or public transport capacity and in the case of enabling social infrastructure, schools provision and community facilities”*. Appendix 1 of these guidelines specifies the housing supply targets and growth requirements to 2040, for each local authority. This is again broadly on the basis of projected population growth divided by 'average household size' to give the projected number of new dwellings required.

In the National Planning Framework and its SEA Report, the key assumptions are (1) that an 'average household size' determines the number of dwellings required and (2) that the target for the *percentage of dwellings* in urban areas equates to target for the *percentage of people* in urban areas.

Prior to the 2025 Apartment Guidelines, local authority development plans were the mechanism to achieve an 'average household size' that aligned with national policy. Under the 2023 Apartment Guidelines (now revoked) the regulated 'mix' of different apartment sizes equated to an 'average household size' of 2.75 persons, which aligned with the NPF.

Under the new guidelines, developers can provide, for example, dense urban schemes with no provision for average/larger households, or suburban and rural schemes with no provision for average/ smaller households, as the 'mix' will be market-driven, rather than plan-driven or evidence-based. Refer to **[Appendix A]**.

### **1.3 BACKGROUND- Housing Market**

Planning controls ensure that the right 'mix' housing is built in accordance with the National Planning Framework and local authority Housing Strategies. When left to the market, investors favour smaller apartment in urban areas because they are more profitable.

Currently in Dublin, a selection of rents for new build apartments show that new-build studios are returning an average of €58- per square metre per month, 1-bedroom apartments €53- and 2-bedroom apartments €41-<sup>20</sup>. Shared accommodation/ 'co-living' rooms are returning over €100-<sup>21</sup>. Larger apartment, although more efficient in terms of building occupancy and use of resources, are less profitable on a square metre basis.

The introduction of small shared accommodation/ co-living rooms under the 2018 Apartment Guidelines was reversed in 2020, because of concerns about the high number of applications for these developments, the risks of oversupply and the inflationary effect on urban land prices<sup>22</sup>. There is a risk of recurrence with a 32sq.m studio typology.

When lower standards for build-to-rent apartments and co-living were introduced, it resulted in an end of the construction of urban build-to-sell apartments which was marginally less profitable. Consequently, investment funds now control over 17,000 new rental apartments<sup>23</sup> while only 943 were sold in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway cities in the last 6 years.<sup>24</sup> In Dublin city, of the 3,350 new homes built in 2024, only 111 apartments were sold to household buyers<sup>25</sup>.

The introduction of new or lower standards also delays development, as schemes that have Planning Permission are often re-designed and re-submitted for an alternative configuration that is more profitable. This adds time delays, risk, and ultimately additional cost to housing development. There have been five iterations of the apartment guidelines in the last decade, all of which have caused uncertainty for investors and developers, and have disrupted the design, approval and delivery of housing.

The introduction of new or lower standards can also be inflationary on land values, because land is valued on the residual. So, if an apartment building can be reconfigured in the same footprint for more units, this raises the value of development land.

#### **1.4 BACKGROUND – Statutory duties of Local Authorities**

The 2020 ‘Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning’ states that: *“planning authorities are required under core planning legislation to ensure that their development plan is consistent with the national and regional development objectives specified in the National Planning Framework and the relevant regional spatial and economic strategy. City and County development plans must therefore plan to provide housing to the extent identified in the established NPF Roadmap population projections for their local authority and accordingly in the NPF 50:50 City housing projection scenario, in core strategy, settlement strategy and associated identification of development potential and zoning exercises”*<sup>26</sup>

The NPF 50:50 objective is that 50% of homes will be in urban areas, with the underlying assumption that 50% of homes equates to 50% of population growth.

Under the 2000 Act<sup>27</sup>, each planning authority, has a statutory duty to prepare a Development Plan that includes a Housing Strategy. This Housing Strategy must take account of existing and future housing needs to ensure *“that housing is available for persons who have different levels of income”* and that *“that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households, as may be determined by the planning authority, and including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities, and (d) the need to counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds”*. In preparing this Strategy, they must have regard to *“the supply of and demand for houses generally, or houses of a particular class or classes, in the whole or part of the area of the development plan”*.<sup>28</sup>

Further, the Act states that *“In conjunction with the inclusion of the housing strategy in its development plan, a planning authority shall ensure that sufficient and suitable land is zoned for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, to meet the requirements of the housing strategy and to ensure that a scarcity of such land does not occur at any time during the period of the development plan”*.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, a statutory Housing Strategy is the mechanism for (1) translating the *average household size* in the NPF into a mix of sizes that complies with the national plan, and (2) establishing the amount of zoned residential land required.

## 2.0 Impacts

### 2.0 IMPACT- 2025 Apartment Guidelines Overview

The new 2025 Apartment Guidelines introduce eight Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs). Refer also to **[Appendix B]** for comparison with 2023 Guidelines.

**SPPR 1:** Removal of requirement for a mix/ no minimum or maximum number of bedrooms in apartments (replacing SPPR1 and SPPR2, 2023).

**SPPR 2:** Reduction in floor areas of studio (1 person) and 2-bedroom (3 person) apartments (replacing SPPR3, 2023).

**SPPR 3:** Reduction in dual aspect requirements (replacing SPPR 4, 2023).

**SPPR 4:** Reduction in ceiling heights (replacing SPPR 5, 2023).

**SPPR 5:** No requirement for a min. number of units per floor (replacing SPPR 6, 2023).

**SPPR 6:** Removal of requirement for Communal, Cultural and Social Facilities (new).

**SPPR 7:** Presumption against shared accommodation/ co-living (no change).

**SPPR 8:** Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) standards (new).

### 2.2 IMPACT -Examples to demonstrate environmental impact SPPR 1 & SPPR 2 2025 (deregulation of apartment 'mix')

The background information above outlined the importance of regulated 'mix' of apartment sizes based on an 'average household size' to ensure (1) a mix of sizes that complies with the NPF, and (2) to establish the amount of zoned residential land required.

This section looks at the wide variations in household size permitted under the 2025 Guidelines, and the potential environmental impacts of re-configured apartment buildings.

In order to demonstrate the range and extent, an example apartment building **[Appendix A]** is re-configured within the same building footprint and form, and assessed across a range of criteria:

**Example A:** a typical 100 unit apartment building under the 2023 Apartment Standards can house up to 275 people with a minimum regulated mix of: 25 studios, 25 x 1-bedroom apartments, 50 x 2-bedroom apartments, 0 x 3-bedroom apartments. This has a nett internal apartment floor area of approximately 5,700m<sup>2</sup> (excl circulation, common areas, structure, services etc.). It can be assumed to have 100 parking spaces (city) or 150 (other areas) and a minimum of 100 kitchens and bathrooms. This building has an average household size of 2.75 persons.

**Example B:** under the 2025 Apartment Standards, the same building can be re-designed as 178 studios, with 178 occupants<sup>30</sup>. This equates to 78% more *units*, but 41% fewer *people* housed within the same building footprint and building form.

Additionally, it is required to have 78% more parking spaces, bathrooms and kitchens. In comparison with Example A, the embodied carbon (construction stage) is more than 50% higher per occupant. Similarly, using hard construction costs as a proxy for the amount of labour and materials required to construct the building, this demonstrates that Example B configuration has a significantly increased environmental impact.

It also means that that the same draw on limited finance, construction capacity and infrastructure for far less. This also has implications for infrastructure provision. For example, a new residential community designed for 200 dwellings per hectare assumes a population of approx. 520 persons per hectare (on the basis of an average household size of 2.6). This is used as the basis for transport and infrastructure planning for that new residential community, including water, drainage, utilities, services, childcare facilities, schools, etc. If the average household size cannot be controlled there are risks of over- or under-supply of infrastructure capacity, which may be damaging to the environment or wasteful of resources.

In simple terms, two 2-bedroom apartments of 73m<sup>2</sup> each can house two families (eight people), but the same floor area as studios fits only four single people, while (in the Dublin market) 'earning' up to 40% more for the investors<sup>31</sup>. In the Land Development Agency presentation [**Appendix E**] it indicates that a 5-person apartment can be replaced with two 2-person apartments, meaning a reduced occupancy of 20% in the same floor area.

**Example C & D:** These are the configuration of the same building under the 2016-22 Dublin City Council standards. They indicate that build-to- sell was a more sustainable building than even the 2023 Guidelines, with 13% less embodied carbon per occupant in the construction stage, and 16% fewer car parking spaces.

**Example E:** This is an example of the planned redevelopment of Cork City Tivoli Docks, indicating an average household size of more than 4 persons, and 72% less embodied carbon and construction cost per occupant, compared to Example A (2023 guidelines).

## **2.2 IMPACT – Land Use**

In the examples above, the occupancy of a building may be reduced substantially within the same building footprint and form under the 2025 guidelines. This has implications for land zoning and sustainable land use. It also risks a situation where 50% of units are developed in urban areas (as NPF objective) without there being 50% of population growth in urban areas.

The lack of provision of housing in urban areas for 'average households' risks being a driver of urban sprawl and displacement of communities. Without controls, market-led housing development tends to the most profitable housing, likely resulting in small apartments in cities without a mix of larger units, and also large houses in urban sprawl without a mix of smaller homes.

## **2.3 IMPACT – Transport**

An increase in car parking requirements, and a decrease in bicycle parking requirements are also potential consequences of the 2025 Guidelines. It is noted that the 2025 Guidelines say that: *"The provision of car parking can also add significant cost to the development of apartment schemes, and in particular where the ratio of parking necessitates a podium or basement car park"* and *"trips by bicycle have the potential to replace motor vehicles as an alternative means of transport for short to medium range trips"*.

There are also issues with other SPPRs, in particular those in the 2018 Height Guidelines and the 2024 Compact Settlement Guidelines. Refer also to [**Appendix D**].

## **2.4 IMPACTS- Climate / Resources**

In addition to the notional embodied carbon per occupant, which is significantly higher in small units at construction stage, it should be noted that this configuration (Example B) will also have higher running, maintenance, replacement and disposal costs, particularly related to the additional kitchens and bathrooms. This includes equipment, fittings and operational costs such as bathroom extraction that functions 24/7, using more energy.

Smaller and open-plan apartments may have an additional requirement for water sprinklers (fire suppression) requiring equipment, water storage on site, additional maintenance, etc. In larger apartment units with entrance lobbies this is not generally required.

## **2.5 IMPACTS- Health, safety and well-being**

There are increased risks to physical and mental health in homes with inadequate space, without outside amenity space, without privacy, and without room for essential human activities. Apartment buildings that are reconfigured for more units have more neighbours in close proximity, with the risk of intrusion from noise, smells, disruption etc. Over-crowded homes have a higher risk of accidents, and cooking is detrimental to indoor air<sup>32</sup> quality, particularly in small spaces where there is inadequate ventilation. It is noted that the reduction in the size of studio apartments from 37 square metres to 32, reduces the volume of air by 12 cubic metres.

In relation to indoor air quality and health, lower ceilings and a lack of cross ventilation result in a smaller quantity of air, raising risks of poor air quality, airborne disease transmission, toxins, allergens, etc. This can also exacerbate over-heating in summer.

Smaller rooms, lower ceilings and deep plan layouts (32 sq.m studio with a min 4 metre width results in an 8m+ deep room) is at risk of inadequate daylight and sunlight, both necessary for wellbeing and mental health.

Inadequate space, and a lack of storage space also risks higher fire loads in the building.

Small units without internal lobbies results in noise and smells transferring to corridors and between units, this is bad for occupant comfort, well-being and mental health.

## **2.6 IMPACTS – Disability/ access / aging/ universal design**

The minimum floor areas in the 2025 Apartment Guidelines are lower than those recommended for disability, accessibility, ageing and caring. Generally the apartment standards are inadequate for the practical requirements of disability and independent living (including wheelchair use, mobility aids, visual impairment, etc). These aspects of housing are not included in the guidelines. *“Achieving safe, affordable and accessible housing for disabled people is an important element of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)”* according to the National Disability Authority<sup>33</sup>.

The 2025 Apartment Guidelines introduce standards for Purpose Built Student Housing (PBSA) for the first time. Previously, the Dublin City Council Development Plan (2016-22) student housing standards<sup>34</sup> (based on the 1999 Finance Act<sup>35</sup>) were widely used, and these included ensuite bedrooms of min. 12sq.m, disabled accessible bedrooms of min. 15sq.m, generally limited to units of 8 bed-spaces and 12 bed-spaces on campus, with shared kitchen/living areas of 4sq.m per bedspace.

Under SPPR 8 2025, the ensuite bedroom area has been reduced to 11.5m<sup>2</sup> and *“the minimum required area for a single study bedroom without en-suite facilities is 8 sq. and the minimum required area for a single study bedroom with en-suite facilities is 11.5 sq.; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR”*. This suggests that providing larger bedrooms for residents with a disability is no longer permitted. Building Regulation Part M- Access & Use, Technical Guidance Document<sup>36</sup> sets standards only for sanitary facilities in student accommodation, and more generally for accessible bedrooms in hotels, but not in student accommodation.

The minimum space requirements for kitchen/dining/living areas serving 10 and 12 persons are 3.6 sq. and 3.3 sq. per person, respectively under the 2025 guidelines. This is a reduction from 4 square metres, as was generally provided previously.

## **2.7 IMPACTS- Childcare facilities**

The provision of childcare facilities<sup>37</sup> in new housing development is national planning policy. However, the 2025 Guidelines state that: *“Notwithstanding the Planning Guidelines for Childcare Facilities (2001), in respect of which a review is to be progressed, and which recommend the provision of one child-care facility (equivalent to a minimum of 20 child places) for every 75 dwelling units, the threshold for provision of any such facilities in apartment schemes should be established having regard to the scale and unit mix of the proposed development... One bedroom or studio type units should not generally be considered to contribute to a requirement for any childcare provision and subject to location, this may also apply in part or whole, to units with two or more bedrooms”*

This means that the removal of a requirement for a ‘mix’ under SPPR1 and SPPR2 2025, also removes the requirement to provide childcare facilities, as these are calculated on the basis of apartments with two bedrooms or more. Without a regulated ‘mix’ these can be designed out. The impact is that fewer facilities will be provided in housing development, and that children will have to travel further to access childcare centres.

## **2.8 IMPACTS- Children’s Play Space**

Similarly, children’s play spaces are required *‘in a scheme that includes 100 or more apartments with two or more bedrooms’*<sup>38</sup>, meaning that apartment buildings can be reconfigured to remove the requirement for play space, as a direct consequence of SPPR1 and SPPR2 2025. The lack of play space in residential developments is detrimental to health and well-being, compounded by the removal of requirements for amenity -up to half of new homes may have no private amenity space<sup>39</sup>, and no requirements for communal spaces.

## **2.9 IMPACT- Community Spaces**

It is now possible to build entire blocks of 32 square metre studio bedsits with no limit on the number of residents sharing a corridor or lift<sup>40</sup>. Up to half of these homes may have no private amenity space<sup>41</sup>. Under the 2025 Guidelines, on urban sites communal outdoor space is negotiable<sup>42</sup> and local authorities may no longer require space to be set aside for laundry, clothes-drying, gyms, community or cultural use.<sup>43</sup> Where facilities are not provided on site occupants will have to travel further to avail of them.

These amenity, service, and support spaces are essential to human activity, health, well-being and society, being a critically important part of a sustainable and functioning residential community.

**/END**

## Appendices:

**Appendix A-** Examples to demonstrate environmental impact of 2025 SPPR 1& SPPR 2 ( de-regulation of ‘mix’ of apartment sizes)

**Appendix B-** Comparison of SPPRs 2025 (new) to SPPRs 2023 (now withdrawn)

**Appendix C-** Issues arising when 2025 Apartment Guideline SPPRs (new) are read in combination with (1) 2024 ‘Compact Settlement Guideline’ SPPRs (current) and, (2) 2018 ‘Height Guidelines’ (current).

**Appendix D-** Issues arising in whether SPPRs 2025 ‘alone or in combination’ can be considered to set a framework for consent, under the terms of the SEA Directive

**Appendix E –** Land Development Agency Presentation (April 2025)

**Appendix F-** RIAI Statement (July 2025)

**Appendix G-** IPI Statement (July 2025)

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<sup>1</sup> (Oireachtas, 2000) Planning & Development Act 2000

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/30/enacted/en/html?q=planning>

<sup>2</sup> (Oireachtas, 2015) Planning & Development Act 2015

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/63/enacted/en/html?q=planning&years=2015>

<sup>3</sup> (Department of Housing, 2015) <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/design-standards-for-new-apartments-guidelines-for-planning-authorities-dec-2015-609-m.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> (Department of Housing) 2018 Apartment Guidelines

<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/design-standards-for-new-apartments-guidelines-for-planning-authorities-march-2018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> (Department of Housing) 2020 Apartment Guidelines <https://www.opr.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/December-2020-Design-Standards-for-New-Apartments.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> (Department of Housing) 2023 Apartment Guidelines

<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/section-28-guidelines-for-planning-authorities-design-standards-for-new-apartments-jul.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> (Department of Housing) 2025 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/design-standards-for-apartments-guidelines-for-planning-authorities/>

<sup>8</sup> (Department of Housing, 2018) Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines (UD) (BHG) (2018)

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/urban-development-and-building-height-guidelines-ud-bhg-2018/>

<sup>9</sup> (Department of Housing) 2024 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/sustainable-residential-development-and-compact-settlements-guidelines-for-planning-authorities/>

<sup>10</sup> (Department of Housing 2024) SEA of the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/sustainable-residential-development-and-compact-settlements-guidelines-for-planning-au.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> (Department of Housing, 2021) Housing for All <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/housing-for-all-a-new-housing-plan-for-ireland/>

<sup>12</sup> (Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment, 2023) <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-climate-energy-and-the-environment/publications/climate-action-plan-2023/>

<sup>13</sup> (Oireachtas, 2000) <https://www.npf.ie/project-ireland-2040-national-planning-framework/>

<sup>14</sup> (Oireachtas, 2000) Planning & Development Act <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/30/enacted/en/html>

<sup>15</sup> (Department of Housing, 2018) [https://cdn.npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/SEA\\_Statement.pdf](https://cdn.npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/SEA_Statement.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> (ESRI, 2024) POPULATION PROJECTIONS, THE FLOW OF NEW HOUSEHOLDS AND STRUCTURAL HOUSING DEMAND <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS190.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report, Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework 2024 <https://www.npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/Strategic-Environmental-Assessment-Environmental-Report.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> (Department of Housing, 2025) National Planning Framework, First Revision <https://www.npf.ie/first-revision-to-the-national-planning-framework/national-planning-framework-first-revision-april-2025/>

<sup>19</sup> (Department of Housing, 2025) NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements [https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/S.28\\_Guidelines\\_-\\_NPF\\_Implementation\\_-\\_Housing\\_Growth\\_Requirements.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/S.28_Guidelines_-_NPF_Implementation_-_Housing_Growth_Requirements.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Sample of monthly rents across 5 Dublin, currently advertised (Sept 2025) locations, sources below:

	<b>Studio</b>	<b>1-bed</b>	<b>2-bed</b>
	37m <sup>2</sup>	45m <sup>2</sup>	73m <sup>2</sup>
Marshall Yards	€2,350	€2,500	€3,400
Alta Verde	€2,195	€2,395	€3,195
Griffith Wood	€2,100	€2,363	€2,900
Spencer Place	€2,100	€2,400	€2,775
Cherrywood	€1,950	€2,200	€2,575
<i>average monthly rent</i>	€2,139	€2,371.6	€2,969
<i>average monthly rent /m<sup>2</sup></i>	€57.8	€52.7	€40.7

Marshall Yards <https://marshallyards.com/> Alta Verde, Blackrock <https://www.daft.ie/for-rent/alta-verde-blackrock-cross-avenue-blackrock-co-dublin/6117164> Griffith Wood <https://www.griffith-wood.com/> Spencer Place, Dublin 1 <https://www.daft.ie/property-for-rent/dublin-city?page=2> Cherrywood, D18 <https://www.daft.ie/property-for-rent/dublin-city?page=2>

<sup>21</sup> Co-living: Niche Rathmines, Niche Dun Laoghaire & Niche Donnybrook all €1,900 (bills included). [https://www.nicheliving.com/ballsbridge/?gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20187942385&gbraid=0AAAAApprvltkvGp01nHzZArDZuK\\_wE44N&gclid=Cj0KQCQjww4TGBhCKARIsAFLXndRYBubpB\\_6PrwBp\\_mVICgIK9Qi5cutWX9bGTLuqEVxZ2OQrkCK52GnEaAhJWEALw\\_wcB](https://www.nicheliving.com/ballsbridge/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20187942385&gbraid=0AAAAApprvltkvGp01nHzZArDZuK_wE44N&gclid=Cj0KQCQjww4TGBhCKARIsAFLXndRYBubpB_6PrwBp_mVICgIK9Qi5cutWX9bGTLuqEVxZ2OQrkCK52GnEaAhJWEALw_wcB)

<sup>22</sup> (RTE news, 2020) 'Co-living developments to be halted over concerns about high number of developments'

<https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/1123/1179877-coliving-housing/#:~:text=Co%2Dliving%20developments%20are%20to,or%20in%20the%20planning%20system.>

<sup>23</sup> (Business Post, 2024) 'Revealed: How many apartments property funds, social housing bodies and households bought since 2017'

<https://www.businesspost.ie/news/revealed-how-many-apartments-property-funds-social-housing-bodies-and-households-bought-since-2017/>

<sup>24</sup> (CSO, 2025) HPM05 Market-based Household Purchases of Residential Dwellings, 2019-2024, Volume of Sales, New, Apartments, Executions, Dublin City: 688, Cork City 82, Limerick City 22, Galway City 151. <https://data.cso.ie/>

<sup>25</sup> (Lorcan Sirr, 2025) <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2025/09/18/lorcan-sirr-dublin-is-becoming-a-place-of-extremes-home-to-only-the-very-richest-and-the-poorest/>

<sup>26</sup> (Department of Housing, 2020) Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning <https://www.opr.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-Section-28-Guidelines-Housing-Demand-and-Housing-Supply-Targets.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> (Oireachtas, 2000) Planning & Development Act 2000

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/30/enacted/en/html?q=planning>

**Section 94 (3):** "A housing strategy shall take into account—(a) the existing need and the likely future need for housing to which subsection (4)(a) applies, (b) the need to ensure that housing is available

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*for persons who have different levels of income, (c) the need to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households, as may be determined by the planning authority, and including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities, and (d) the need to counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds.*

**(4)** (a) A housing strategy shall include an estimate of the amount of—(i) housing for persons referred to in section 9 (2) of the Housing Act, 1988 , and (ii) affordable housing, required in the area of the development plan during the period of the development plan and the estimate may state the different requirements for different areas within the area of the development plan (b) For the purpose of making an estimate under paragraph (a)(ii), a planning authority may exclude eligible persons who own or have previously owned a house.

(c) Subject to paragraph (d), a housing strategy shall provide that as a general policy a specified percentage, not being more than 20 per cent, of the land zoned for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, shall be reserved under this Part for the provision of housing for the purposes of either or both subparagraphs (i) and (ii) of paragraph (a).

(d) Paragraph (c) shall not operate to prevent any person (including a local authority) from using more than 20 per cent. of land zoned for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, for the provision of housing to which paragraph (a) applies

**(5)** (a) When making an estimate under subsection (4)(a)(ii), the planning authority shall have regard to the following: (i) the supply of and demand for houses generally, or houses of a particular class or classes, in the whole or part of the area of the development plan; (ii) the price of houses generally, or houses of a particular class or classes, in the whole or part of the area of the development plan; (iii) the income of persons generally or of a particular class or classes of person who require houses in the area of the development plan; (iv) the rates of interest on mortgages for house purchase; (v) the relationship between the price of housing under subparagraph (ii), incomes under subparagraph (iii) and rates of interest under subparagraph (iv) for the purpose of establishing the affordability of houses in the area of the development plan; (vi) such other matters as the planning authority considers appropriate or as may be prescribed for the purposes of this subsection”

<sup>28</sup> ‘House’ in this context includes apartments, (Oireachtas, 2000) Planning & Development Act, 2000 Definitions: “house” means a building or part of a building which is being or has been occupied as a dwelling or was provided for use as a dwelling but has not been occupied, and where appropriate, includes a building which was designed for use as 2 or more dwellings or a flat, an apartment or other dwelling within such a building”.

<sup>29</sup> (Oireachtas, 2000) Planning & Development Act 2000

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/30/enacted/en/html?q=planning>

**Section 95 (1)”** (a) In conjunction with the inclusion of the housing strategy in its development plan, a planning authority shall ensure that sufficient and suitable land is zoned for residential use, or for a mixture of residential and other uses, to meet the requirements of the housing strategy and to ensure that a scarcity of such land does not occur at any time during the period of the development plan”

<sup>30</sup> Basis: Example assumes an 100-unit apartment building with approx. 5,700m<sup>2</sup> apartment internal space (excl. common areas, circulation etc.)

2016 Dublin City Council standard: total occupancy 301px (5,687m<sup>2</sup>) as 15 x 3bed (1,350m<sup>2</sup>)= 75px, 25 x 1bed (1,125m<sup>2</sup>) =50px, 44x 2bed (3,212m<sup>2</sup>)= 176px

2023 Dept Housing standard: total occupancy 275px (5,700m<sup>2</sup>) as 50 x 2bed (3,650m<sup>2</sup>)=200px, 25 x 1bed (1,125m<sup>2</sup>) =50px, 25 x studio (925m<sup>2</sup>)= 25px

2025 Dept Housing standard: total occupancy 178px (5,696m<sup>2</sup>) as 178x studio (5,696m<sup>2</sup>)

<sup>31</sup> Basis: 2x 73m<sup>2</sup>= 146m<sup>2</sup>, assume rental income €41/m<sup>2</sup> = €5,986/month, 4x36m<sup>2</sup>= 144m<sup>2</sup>, assume rental income €58/m<sup>2</sup> =€8,352 (40% more)

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<sup>32</sup> (Passive House, 2020) **Hell's kitchen - Why cooking can destroy indoor air quality**  
<https://passivehouseplus.ie/magazine/insight/hell-s-kitchen-why-cooking-can-destroy-indoor-air-quality>

<sup>33</sup> (National Disability Authority) <https://nda.ie/housing>

<sup>34</sup> (Dublin City Development Plan, 2016-22) Guidelines for Student Accommodation:

*“Student accommodation to generally be provided by grouping study bedrooms in ‘house’ units, with a minimum of 3 bed spaces with an overall minimum gross floor area of 55 sq. up to a maximum of 8 bed spaces and a maximum gross floor area of 160 sq. Single/double occupancy studio units that provide en-suite bathroom facilities and kitchenettes/cooking facilities will also be considered, with a minimum gross floor area of 25 sq. and a maximum gross floor area of 35 sq.. Within campus locations consideration will be given to the provision of townhouse, ‘own-door’ student accommodation with a maximum of 12 bed spaces per townhouse. Shared kitchen/living/dining rooms shall be provided, based on a minimum 4 sq. per bed space in the ‘house’ and ‘town house’ unit, in addition to any circulation space.*

*Minimum bedrooms sizes for ‘house’ and ‘town house’ units will be:*

*Single study bedroom: 8 sq. (with en-suite shower, toilet and basin: 12 sq.)*

*Twin study bedroom: 15 sq. (with en-suite shower, toilet and basin: 18 sq.)*

*Single disabled study bedroom, with en-suite disabled shower, toilet and basin: 15 sq.)*

*Bathrooms: Either en-suite with study bedrooms/studio units or to serve a maximum of 3 bed spaces.*

*Communal facilities and services which serve the needs of students shall be provided for, which include laundry facilities, caretaker/ security and refuse facilities (either on site or nearby within a campus setting)”*

<sup>35</sup> (Dept of Finance, 1999) <https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm-wm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-10/10-11-04.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> (Department of Housing, 2022) Building Regulation Part M- Access & Use, Technical Guidance Document (TGD M) <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/technical-guidance-document-m-access-and-use-2022.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> (Department of Housing 2023) *“Notwithstanding the Planning Guidelines for Childcare Facilities (2001), ..the threshold for provision of any such facilities in apartment schemes should be established having regard to the scale and unit mix of the proposed development... **One bedroom or studio type units should not generally be considered to contribute to a requirement for any childcare provision and subject to location, this may also apply in part or whole, to units with two or more bedrooms”***  
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/section-28-guidelines-for-planning-authorities-design-standards-for-new-apartments-jul.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> (ibid) *“Children’s play needs around the apartment building should be catered for.. in a scheme that includes 25 or more units with two or more bedrooms; and ..., in a scheme that includes 100 or more apartments with two or more bedrooms”*

<sup>39</sup> (ibid) *“The number of units without direct access to private amenity space within apartment schemes should not exceed 50%”*

<sup>40</sup> (ibid) *“Specific Planning Policy Requirement 5: There shall be no requirement within statutory plans or within an individual scheme in respect of a minimum number of units per floor per core”*

<sup>41</sup> (ibid) *“The number of units without direct access to private amenity space within apartment schemes should not exceed 50%”*

<sup>42</sup> (ibid) *“For building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25ha, communal amenity space may be relaxed in part or whole, on a case-by-case basis, subject to overall design quality”*

<sup>43</sup> (ibid) *“Specific Planning Policy Requirement 6: The provision of new Communal, Community and Cultural facilities within apartment .. shall not be required on a blanket threshold-based approach in individual apartment schemes”*

## Appendix A: Examples to demonstrate environmental impact SPPR 1 & SPPR 2 2025 (deregulation of apartment ‘mix’)

The examples below are based on an apartment development (approx. **5,700 m2 internal apartment area**, excluding common areas, circulation, basement, shared space etc), which equates to **100 apartment** under the 2023 Apartment Guidelines.

	Number of Apartments (max.)	Number of Occupants (max.)	Car Parking spaces <sup>1</sup>	Number of Kitchens & Bathrooms (min.) <sup>2</sup>	Sprinkler Systems <sup>3</sup> (Fire Suppression)	Average household size	Indicative Floor area per occupant <sup>4</sup>	Indicative Embodied Carbon per occupant <sup>5</sup>	Indicative Construction Cost per occupant <sup>6</sup>	Index = 100 2023 Guidelines
<b>2023 APARTMENT GUIDELINES</b> SPPRs (now withdrawn) 5,700m2 (nett apartment area) as 25 studio, 25x 1-bed, 50x 2-bed, 0x 3-bed apartments										
<b>Example A</b> <i>Build to Sell &amp; Build to Rent</i>	<b>100 homes</b>	<b>275 people</b>	100 spaces city or 150 other areas	100	Yes, smaller apartments	2.75 people	21 m2 (nett) 26 m2 (gross)	-- <b>124</b> KgCo2e/m2	-- €78,000	100
<b>2025 APARTMENT GUIDELINES</b> SPPRs 5,696m2 (nett apartment area) as 178 studio apartments.										
<b>Example B</b> <i>Build to Sell &amp; Build to Rent</i>	<b>178 homes</b>	<b>178 people</b>	178 spaces city or 267 spaces other areas	178	Yes, smaller apartments	1.0 person	32 m2 (nett) 40 m2 (gross)	-- <b>192</b> KgCo2e/m2	-- €120,000	154
<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY STATUTORY DEVELOPMENT PLANS</b> (for comparison)										
<b>2016 Dublin City Development Plan (2016-2022)</b> <sup>7</sup> 5,687m2 (nett, apartment area) as 0 studio 25x 1-bed 44x 2-bed 15x 3-bed <sup>8</sup>										
<b>Example C</b> <i>Build to Sell</i>	<b>84 homes</b>	<b>316 people</b>	84 spaces city & 126 other areas <sup>9</sup>	84	No	3.76 people	18m2 (nett) 22.5 m2 (gross)	-- <b>107.9</b> KgCo2e/m2	-- €67,500	87
<b>2016 Dublin City Development Plan (2016-2022)</b> <sup>10</sup> 5,683m2 (nett apartment area) as 51 x studio, 52 x 2bed										
<b>Example D</b> <i>Build to Let</i>	<b>103 homes</b>	<b>259 people</b>	103 spaces city & 154 other areas	103	No	2.5 people	22m2 (nett) 27.4 m2 (gross)	-- <b>131.7</b> KgCo2e/m2	-- €82,200	105
<b>2022-28 Cork City Development Plan Tivoli Docks Development</b> <sup>11</sup> 5,699m2 (nett, apartment floor area) as 1 studio, 15x 1-bed, 37x 2-bed, 22x 3-bed, 3 x 4-bed										
<b>Example E</b>	<b>78 homes</b>	<b>335 people</b>	--	78	Yes, smaller apartments	4.3 people	17m2 (nett) 21.3 m2 (gross)	-- <b>102.0</b> KgCo2e/m2	€63,900	82

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<sup>1</sup> (DCC, 2016) 1 parking space per dwelling in zone 1 (city centre) and 1.5 spaces in zone 2 and 3 (other areas)

<sup>2</sup> (Department of Housing, 2008) Building Regulations Part G- Hygiene min.1 kitchen and 1 bathroom per apartment. <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/technical-guidance-document-g-hygiene-2008-74856-kb.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> (Department of Housing ) Building Regulations Part B- Fire Safety 2006 (reprinted 2020) “1.6.3 Internal Layouts. The means of escape requirements in open plan flats are determined by the maximum travel distance within the flat. Where the travel distance is less than or equal to 9 m, the provisions of 1.1.2 [ no sprinkler] apply. Where the maximum travel distance exceeds 9 m, and where the appropriate alternate means of escape (see 1.1.2) has not been provided, the following provisions apply (see Diagram 9A): (a) a sprinkler system in accordance with Section 1.8 should be provided, (b) the flat should be situated on a single storey only, (c) the travel distance from any point in the flat to the final exit from the flat should not exceed 20 m” <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/technical-guidance-document-b-fire-safety-2006-119-mb.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Basis: Nett= internal area of apartments, Gross= Nett x 1.25 to include common areas, circulation etc.

<sup>5</sup> (Comerford, P., 2025) Embodied Carbon and the Climate Impact of our Housing <https://www.housingagency.ie/publications/embodied-carbon-and-climate-impact-our-housing> The Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) estimates greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of upfront embodied carbon for construction life cycle stages A1-A5, including the processing of materials and manufacture of products, transport to the site, and the construction process. The methodology used follows the European standard EN 15978, and the scope follows the EU Level(s) sustainability framework. The LCAs use the Upfront tool developed by the Irish Green Building Council (IGBC), that contains material and carbon data specific to the Irish construction industry. Urban apartment, Embodied Carbon Stages A1-A5 (construction phases): 445KgCo2e/m2 / 93m2 gross floor area= 4.8 KgCo2e/m2 (p31)

<sup>6</sup> Indicative Construction Cost includes ‘hard costs’ only (excl. parking, basement, site works, fees, charges, finance profit, land etc), as a proxy for estimating the resource requirements in construction labour and materials. Basis: assume €3,000/m2 Construction Costs from (Department of Housing, 2024) Urban Apartment, Total Development Cost (p.27) H1 2024 €2,924/m2 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/total-development-cost-report/> & (SCSE, 2025) indexed to H1 2025 using SCSi Tender Price Index [https://scsi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/SCSi\\_TenderPriceIndex\\_August2025Final-19.8.pdf](https://scsi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/SCSi_TenderPriceIndex_August2025Final-19.8.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> (Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022) <https://www.dublincity.ie/dublin-city-development-plan-2016-2022> “A maximum of 25-30% one-bedroom units .A minimum of 15% three- or more bedroom units”

<sup>8</sup> (Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022) p.323 “A maximum of 25-30% one-bedroom units. A minimum of 15% three- or more bedroom units These maximum and minimum requirements apply to proposals of 15 units or more and may not apply to certain social housing needs and/or where there is a need for a particular form of housing for older people and students having regard to the housing strategy. The above mix of unit types will not apply to managed ‘build-to-let’ apartment schemes for mobile workers where up to 42-50% of the total units may be in the form of one bed or studio units”

<sup>9</sup> (Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022) p.361 “it is considered desirable that one car parking space (or as required by Table 16.1) be provided off-street within the curtilage of the development per residential unit, as car storage requirements cannot be met on-street for all residents” Zone 1: 1 per dwelling, zone 2 & 3: 1.5 per dwelling”

<sup>10</sup> (Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022) <https://www.dublincity.ie/dublin-city-development-plan-2016-2022> “up to 42-50% of the total units may be in the form of one bed or studio units”

<sup>11</sup> (Cork City Development Plan 2022-28) Tivoli Docks Development area (p.481) <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/cork-city-development-plan/volume-1-written-statement/>

## Appendix B:

### Comparison between 2025 Apartment guideline SPPRs 2025 (new) with 2023 Apartment Guideline SPPRs 2023 (withdrawn).

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (2025) <sup>1</sup>	Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (2023) <sup>2</sup>
<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 1 (2025)</b>            (A) With the exception of social housing developments, social/affordable housing provided for under Part V the Act or schemes to provide housing for older persons where a specific mix of unit sizes may be required, such as in accordance with a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA), there shall be <u>no restrictions within statutory plans</u> in relation to the mix of unit sizes or types to be provided within apartment developments. There shall be <u>no minimum or maximum requirements for apartments with a certain number of bedrooms</u>.</p> <p>(B) Where any such restriction or requirement is set out within a statutory plan, <u>this Specific Planning Policy Requirement shall apply to any single apartment scheme</u> and there shall be <u>no restriction in relation to the mix of unit sizes or types</u> and there shall be <u>no minimum requirements for apartments with a certain number of bedrooms</u> within the development, except in the circumstances set out above.</p>	<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 1 (2023 )</b>  <u>Housing developments may include up to 50% one-bedroom or studio type units (with no more than 20-25% of the total proposed development as studios)</u> and there shall be no minimum requirement for apartments with three or more bedrooms. <u>Statutory development plans may specify a mix for apartment and other housing developments, but only further to an evidence-based Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA)</u>, that has been agreed on an area, county, city or metropolitan area basis and incorporated into the relevant development plan(s).</p> <p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 2 (2023 )</b>            For all building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size, or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25ha:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Where up to 9 residential units are proposed, notwithstanding SPPR 1, there shall be no restriction on dwelling mix, provided no more than 50% of the development (i.e. up to 4 units) comprises studio-type units;</u></li> <li>• <u>Where between 10 to 49 residential units are proposed, the flexible dwelling mix provision for the first 9 units may be carried forward and the parameters set out in SPPR 1, shall apply from the 10th residential unit to the 49th;</u></li> <li>• <u>For schemes of 50 or more units, SPPR 1 shall apply to the entire development;</u></li> </ul>           All standards set out in this guidance shall generally apply to building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size, or urban infill schemes, but there shall also be scope for planning authorities to exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the overall quality of a proposed development         </p>
<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 2</b>            The following minimum apartment floor areas shall apply and <u>statutory plans shall not specify minimum floor areas that exceed the minimum floor areas set out below:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Studio apartment (1 person) 32sq.m</u></li> <li>• <u>1-bedroom apartment (2 persons) 45 sq.m</u></li> <li>• <u>2 bedroom apartment (3 persons) 63 sq.m</u></li> <li>• <u>2-bedroom apartment (4 persons) 73 sq.m</u></li> <li>• <u>3-bedroom apartment (4 persons) 76 sq. m</u></li> <li>• <u>3-bedroom apartment (5 persons) 90 sq.m</u></li> </ul> <p>The floor area parameters set out above shall generally apply to apartment schemes and <u>do not apply to purpose-built and managed student housing</u>”.</p>	<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 3 (2023 )</b>            Minimum Apartment Floor Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studio apartment (1 person) 37 sq.m</li> <li>• 1-bedroom apartment (2 persons) 45 sq.m</li> <li>• 2-bedroom apartment (4 persons) 73 sq.m</li> <li>• 3-bedroom apartment (5 persons) 90 sq.m</li> </ul>

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (2025) <sup>1</sup>	Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (2023) <sup>2</sup>
<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 3 (2025)</b>  In relation to the minimum number of dual aspect apartments that may be provided in any single apartment scheme, the following shall apply: (i) <u>A minimum of 25% of units within a development shall be required to be dual aspect.</u> Statutory plans shall not specify minimum requirements that exceed the requirements of this Specific Planning Policy Requirement. (ii) For building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25ha, planning authorities may exercise further discretion to consider dual aspect unit provision at a level lower than the 25% minimum outlined above on a case-by-case basis, but subject to the achievement of overall high design quality in other aspects.</p>	<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 4 (2023)</b>  In relation to the minimum number of dual aspect apartments that may be provided in any single apartment scheme, the following shall apply: (i) <u>A minimum of 33% of dual aspect units will be required in more central and accessible urban locations, where it is necessary to achieve a quality design in response to the subject site characteristics and ensure good street frontage where appropriate in.</u> (ii) <u>In suburban or intermediate locations it is an objective that there shall generally be a minimum of 50% dual aspect apartments in a single scheme.</u> (iii) For building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25ha , planning authorities may exercise further discretion to consider dual aspect unit provision at a level lower than the 33% minimum outlined above on a case-by-case basis, but subject to the achievement of overall high design quality in other aspects</p>
<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 4 (2025)</b>  <u>Ground level apartment floor to ceiling heights shall be a minimum of 2.7m.</u> For building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25ha, planning authorities may exercise discretion on a case-by case basis, subject to overall design quality.</p>	<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 5 (2023)</b>  Specific Planning Policy Requirement 5 Ground level apartment floor to ceiling heights shall be a minimum of 2.7m <u>and shall be increased in certain circumstances, particularly where necessary to facilitate a future change of use to a commercial use.</u> For building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25ha , planning authorities may exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis, subject to overall design quality.</p>
<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 5 (2025)</b>  <u>There shall be no requirement within statutory plans or within an individual scheme in respect of a minimum number of units per floor per core.</u></p>	<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 6 (2023)</b>  <u>A maximum of 12 apartments per floor per core may be provided in apartment schemes.</u> This maximum provision may be increased for building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25ha, subject to overall design quality and compliance with building regulations.</p>
<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 6</b>  The provision of <u>new Communal, Community and Cultural facilities</u> within apartment schemes shall only be required in specific locations identified within the development plan and <u>shall not be required on a blanket threshold-based approach in individual apartment schemes.</u></p>	

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (2025) <sup>1</sup>	Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments (2023) <sup>2</sup>
<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 7</b> There shall be a presumption against granting planning permission for shared accommodation/co-living development unless the proposed development is required to meet specific demand identified by a local planning authority further to a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) process.</p>	<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 7</b> here shall be a presumption against granting planning permission for shared accommodation/co-living development unless the proposed development is required to meet specific demand identified by a local planning authority further to a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) process.</p>
<p><b>Specific Planning Policy Requirement 8</b> (A) (i) There shall be no requirement or restriction in relation to the provision of en-suite bathrooms for single study bedrooms within Purpose Built Student Accommodation schemes. (ii) <u>The minimum required area for a single study bedroom without en-suite facilities is 8 sq.m and the minimum required area for a single study bedroom with en-suite facilities is 11.5 sq.m; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR.</u> (iii) <u>The minimum space requirements for kitchen/dining/living areas serving 10 and 12 persons are 3.6 sq.m and 3.3 sq.m per person, respectively;</u> and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR. (B) Where any other requirement or restriction is set out within a statutory plan, this Specific Planning Policy Requirement shall apply to any single student accommodation scheme.</p>	<p><b>Note:</b> Minimum sizes for Purpose Built Student Accommodation were not previously included in the Planning Guidelines, however the Dublin City Development Plans (2016-22) and (2022-28) (based on the Finance Act 1999) set a min. 12 sq.m for an en-suite bedroom, 15 sq.m for a disabled accessible en-suite bedroom and min. 4 sq.m per bedspace for shared kitchen/ living/dining spaces, with a max. of 12 bedspaces per cluster.</p> <p>These PBSA space standards are now reduced and under SPPR 8 (2025) local authorities “<i>may not set out a minimum required areas that exceed the minimum</i>” meaning that student bedrooms larger than 11.5 sq.m suitable for the needs of students with a disability are no longer permitted.<sup>3</sup></p>

/END

<sup>1</sup> (Department of Housing, 2025) Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025

[https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Planning\\_Design\\_Standards\\_for\\_Apartments\\_080725\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Planning_Design_Standards_for_Apartments_080725_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> (Department of Housing, 2023) Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2023 <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/section-28-guidelines-for-planning-authorities-design-standards-for-new-apartments-july-2023/>

<sup>33</sup> Dublin City Development Plan 2016-22 p.334) <https://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/2020-08/written-statement-volume-1.pdf>

## Appendix C:

### Issues arising when 2025 Apartment Guideline SPPRs (new) are read in combination:

- (1) 2024 'Compact Settlement Guideline' SPPRs (current) and,
- (2) 2018 'Height Guidelines' (current). **Note:** SEA Reports for the 2018 Building Height Guidelines were not available to me at the time of preparing this section of the report.

<b>(1) 'Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities' 2024 <sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Issues when read in combination with SPPRs in 'Apartment Guidelines' 2025<sup>2</sup></b>
<p><b>SPPR 1 - Separation Distances</b></p> <p>It is a specific planning policy requirement of these Guidelines that statutory development plans <u>shall not include an objective in respect of minimum separation distances that exceed 16 metres between opposing windows serving habitable rooms at the rear or side of houses, duplex units or apartment units above ground floor level.</u> When considering a planning application for residential development, a separation distance of at least 16 metres between opposing windows serving habitable rooms at the rear or side of houses, duplex units and apartment units, above ground floor level shall be maintained. Separation distances below 16 metres may be considered acceptable in circumstances where there are no opposing windows serving habitable rooms and where suitable privacy measures have been designed into the scheme to prevent undue overlooking of habitable rooms and private amenity spaces. <u>There shall be no specified minimum separation distance at ground level or to the front of houses, duplex units and apartment units</u> in statutory development plans and planning applications shall be determined on a case-by-case basis to prevent undue loss of privacy. In all cases, the obligation will be on the project proposer to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the planning authority or An Bord Pleanála that residents will enjoy a high standard of amenity and that the proposed development will not have a significant negative impact on the amenity of occupiers of existing residential properties. This SPPR will not apply to applications made in a Strategic Development Zone until the Planning Scheme is amended to integrate changes arising from the SPPR. Refer to Section 2.1.2 for further detail.</p>	<p>Minimum separation distances ensure privacy between opposing windows of dwellings, but also mitigate risks of over-shadowing, loss of daylight, poor airflow/ventilation, etc.</p> <p>A reduction in separation distances (SPPR1 2024) taken in combination with reduced ceiling height (SPPR4 2025) and reduced floor area (SPPR2 2025) and reduction in dual-aspect apartments (SPPR3 2025) may negatively impact: ventilation, daylighting, sunlight and amenity in homes. Minimum separation distances are a means of controlling amenity, privacy, health and well-being of occupants.</p>
<p><b>SPPR 2 - Minimum Private Open Space Standards for Houses</b></p> <p>It is a specific planning policy requirement of these Guidelines that proposals for new houses meet the following minimum private open space standards: 1 bed house 20 sq.m 2 bed house 30 sq.m 3 bed house 40 sq.m 4 bed + house 50 sq.m A further reduction below the minimum standard may be considered acceptable where an equivalent amount of high quality semi-private open space is provided</p>	

<b>(1) ‘Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ 2024<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Issues when read in combination with SPPRs in ‘Apartment Guidelines’ 2025<sup>2</sup></b>
<p>in lieu of the private open space, subject to at least 50 percent of the area being provided as private open space (see Table 5.1 below). The planning authority should be satisfied that the compensatory semi-private open space will provide a high standard of amenity for all users and that it is well integrated and accessible to the housing units it serves.</p> <p><u>Apartments and duplex units shall be required to meet the private and semiprivate open space requirements set out in the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2023 (and any subsequent updates).</u> For building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on smaller sites (e.g. sites of up to 0.25ha) the private open space standard may be relaxed in part or whole, on a case-by-case basis, subject to overall design quality and proximity to public open space. In all cases, the obligation will be on the project proposer to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the planning authority or An Bord Pleanála that residents will enjoy a high standard of amenity. This SPPR will not apply to applications made in a Strategic Development Zone until the Planning Scheme is amended to integrate changes arising from the SPPR. Refer to Section 2.1.2 for further detail.</p>	<p>Open Space requirements for apartments (SPPR2 2024) references back to 2023 Guidelines, which are now withdrawn (not updated). The 2025 SPPRs do not set a minimum standard for open space:</p> <p><i>“Planning authorities may accept a reduced provision of balconies where high quality, usable communal open space is provided within the scheme or where their amenity value is negligible, such as: (a) where units front onto major sources of noise and air pollution, such as busy roads or; (b) on taller buildings/facades that are exposed to high wind conditions. <u>The number of units without direct access to private amenity space within apartment schemes should not exceed 50%</u>”</i></p> <p>The 2025 guidelines are in conflict with SPPR1 2024 (as underlined).</p>
<p><b>SPPR 3 - Car Parking</b></p> <p>It is a specific planning policy requirement of these Guidelines that: (i) <u>In city centres and urban neighbourhoods of the five cities</u>, defined in Chapter 3 (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2) car-parking provision should be minimised, substantially reduced or wholly eliminated. <u>The maximum rate of car parking provision for residential development at these locations, where such provision is justified to the satisfaction of the planning authority, shall be 1 no. space per dwelling.</u></p> <p>(ii) <u>In accessible locations</u>, defined in Chapter 3 (Table 3.8) car- parking provision should be substantially reduced. <u>The maximum rate of car parking provision for residential development, where such provision is justified to the satisfaction of the planning authority, shall be 1.5 no. spaces per dwelling.</u></p> <p>(iii) <u>In intermediate and peripheral locations</u>, defined in Chapter 3 (Table 3.8) <u>the maximum rate of car parking provision for residential development, where such provision is justified to the satisfaction of the planning authority, shall be 2 no. spaces per dwelling.</u> Applicants should be required to provide a rationale and justification for the number of car parking spaces proposed and to satisfy the planning</p>	<p>Car Parking requirements are set in the 2024 Guidelines, variously as between 1, 1.5 and 2 spaces per dwelling. This is included in the 2025 Guidelines as <i>“The SRDCSGs outline car parking ratios for all residential development based on accessibility to public transport services.”</i> (p.3). The increase in the number of dwellings per building (SPPR 1 2025) will therefore result in an increase in car parking spaces required to be provided in apartment buildings in many cases. The consequence of this may mean in loss of outdoor amenity space, and/ or the construction of additional basement space. This is in conflict with another part of the 2025 guidelines which state that <i>“car parking ratios should be minimised”</i> (p.25) In some locations, the environmental impact of additional traffic may be significant.</p>

<b>(1) ‘Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ 2024 <sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Issues when read in combination with SPPRs in ‘Apartment Guidelines’ 2025<sup>2</sup></b>
<p>authority that the parking levels are necessary and appropriate, particularly when they are close to the maximum provision. The maximum car parking standards do not include bays assigned for use by a car club, designated short stay on–street Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations or accessible parking spaces. The maximum car parking standards do include provision for visitor parking. This SPPR will not apply to applications made in a Strategic Development Zone until the Planning Scheme is amended to integrate changes arising from the SPPR. Refer to Section 2.1.2 for further detail.</p>	
<p><b>SPPR 4 - Cycle Parking and Storage</b>  It is a specific planning policy requirement of these Guidelines that <u>all new housing schemes</u> (including mixed-use schemes that include housing) include safe and secure cycle storage facilities to meet the needs of residents and visitors. The following requirements for cycle parking and storage are recommended:  (i) Quantity – in the case of residential units that do not have ground level open space or have smaller terraces, <u>a general minimum standard of 1 cycle storage space per bedroom should be applied.</u> Visitor cycle parking should also be provided. Any deviation from these standards shall be at the discretion of the planning authority and shall be justified with respect to factors such as location, quality of facilities proposed, flexibility for future enhancement/ enlargement, etc. It will be important to make provision for a mix of bicycle parking types including larger/heavier cargo and electric bikes and for individual lockers.  (ii) Design – cycle storage facilities should be provided in a dedicated facility of permanent construction, within the building footprint or, where not feasible, within an adjacent or adjoining purpose-built structure of permanent construction. Cycle parking areas shall be designed so that cyclists feel safe. It is best practice that either secure cycle cage/compound or preferably locker facilities are provided</p>	<p>Cycle Parking requirements are set in the 2024 Guidelines, generally 1 cycle storage space per bedspace.  A decrease in the number of bedspaces will result in a reduction in the number of cycle parking spaces required in apartment buildings in many cases.  This may result in additional traffic in some cases.  This is conflict with another part of the 2025 guidelines that state that <i>“A compact growth approach to settlement patterns can make a transformational difference to settlements of all sizes by bringing in new life and footfall, contributing to the viability of services, shops and public transport, increasing housing supply and enabling more people to be closer to employment and recreational opportunities, as well as to walk or cycle more and use the car less” (p.7).</i></p>

**/CONTINUED OVER**

<b>(2) Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines SPPRs 2018<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Issues when read in combination with SPPRs 2025<sup>4</sup></b>
<p><b>SPPR 1 – Building Height</b>            In accordance with Government policy to support increased building height and density in locations with good public transport accessibility, particularly town/ city cores, planning authorities shall explicitly identify, through their statutory plans, areas where <u>increased building height will be actively pursued for both redevelopment, regeneration and infill development to secure the objectives of the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and shall not provide for blanket numerical limitations on building height.</u></p>	<p>Increased residential densities to support compact growth in <i>‘locations with good transport accessibility, particularly town/city cores’</i> (SPPR 1 2018) may not be achieved with some mixes of apartment sizes permitted under (SPPRs 2025).</p>
<p><b>SPPR 2 – Mix of Uses</b>            In driving general increases in building heights, <u>planning authorities shall also ensure appropriate mixtures of uses</u>, such as housing and commercial or employment development, are provided for in statutory plan policy. Mechanisms such as block delivery sequencing in statutory plans could be utilised to link the provision of new office, commercial, appropriate retail provision and residential accommodation, <u>thereby enabling urban redevelopment to proceed in a way that comprehensively meets contemporary economic and social needs</u>, such as for housing, offices, <u>social and community infrastructure, including leisure facilities.</u></p>	<p>Residential development that is <i>‘mono type’</i> (SPPR1, SPPR 8 2025) (composed only of limited housing types serving limited demographics) may not <i>‘comprehensively meet contemporary economic and social needs’</i> (SPPR 2, 2018). This is in conflict with the 2025 guidelines.</p> <p>Residential development that exclude a requirement for <i>‘communal, community and cultural facilities’</i> (SPPR 6 2025) may not provide for <i>‘social and community infrastructure, including leisure facilities’</i> required (SPPR 2 2018). This is in conflict with the 2025 guidelines.</p>
<p><b>SPPR 3 – Transition arrangements/ review of Plans</b>            It is a specific planning policy requirement that where;            (A) 1. an applicant for planning permission sets out how a development proposal complies with the criteria above; and 2. the assessment of the planning authority concurs, taking account of the wider strategic and national policy parameters set out in the National Planning Framework and these guidelines; then the planning authority may approve such development, even where specific objectives of the relevant development plan or local area plan may indicate otherwise.            (B) In the case of an adopted planning scheme the Development Agency in conjunction with the relevant planning authority (where different) shall, upon the coming into force of these guidelines, undertake a review of the planning scheme, utilising the relevant mechanisms as set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) to ensure</p>	<p>---</p>

<b>(2) Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines SPPRs 2018<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Issues when read in combination with SPPRs 2025<sup>4</sup></b>
<p>that the criteria above are fully reflected in the planning scheme. In particular the Government policy that building heights be generally increased in appropriate urban locations shall be articulated in any amendment(s) to the planning scheme (C) In respect of planning schemes approved after the coming into force of these guidelines these are not required to be reviewed.</p>	
<p><b>SPPR 4 -</b> It is a specific planning policy requirement that in planning the future development of greenfield or edge of city/town locations for housing purposes, <u>planning authorities must secure:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>the minimum densities for such locations set out in the Guidelines issued by the Minister under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), titled “Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2007)” or any amending or replacement Guidelines;</u></li> <li>2. <u>a greater mix of building heights and typologies</u> in planning for the future development of suburban locations; and</li> <li>3. <u>avoid mono-type building typologies (e.g. two storey or own-door houses only),</u> particularly, but not exclusively so in any one development of 100 units or more.</li> </ol>	<p>Residential densities (SPPR 4 (1) 2018) may not be achieved with some mixes of apartment sizes permitted under SPPRs 2025. <i>Note: 2007 Guidelines<sup>5</sup> (revised 2009) were not issued under Section 28 (as revised 2015). The 2024 ‘Compact Settlement Guidelines’ (above) replace the 2009 Guidelines &amp; these were issued under Section 28 (revised) and include SPPRs.</i></p> <p>‘Mix of typologies in future development of suburban locations’ (SPPR 4 2018) may not be achieved with some mixes of apartment sizes permitted under SPPR 1 2025.</p> <p>Requirement to ‘avoid mono-type building typologies’ (SPPR 4 (3) 2018). This is in conflict with the 2025 guidelines.</p>

**/END**

<sup>1</sup> (Department of Housing, 2024) Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/2cd4f729-sustainable-residential-development-and-compact-settlements-guidelines-for-pl.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> (Department of Housing, 2025) Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025  
[https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Planning\\_Design\\_Standards\\_for\\_Apartments\\_080725\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Planning_Design_Standards_for_Apartments_080725_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> (Department of Housing, 2018) Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines (UD) (BHG) (2018)  
<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/urban-development-and-building-height-guidelines-ud-bhg-2018/>

<sup>4</sup> (Department of Housing, 2025) Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025  
[https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Planning\\_Design\\_Standards\\_for\\_Apartments\\_080725\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Planning_Design_Standards_for_Apartments_080725_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> (Department of Housing, 2007) Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities  
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/quality-housing-for-sustainable-communities-design-guidelines.pdf>

## Appendix D:

### Issues arising in whether SPPRs 2025 ‘alone or in combination’ can be considered to set a framework for consent, under the terms of the SEA Directive

Commentary with reference to Department of Housing letter, 12 June 2025<sup>1</sup>

Department of Housing letter, Dated 12 June 2025	Commentary
<p>“The key issue in terms of the SEA Directive is whether or not the SPPRs within the draft <u>Guidelines alone or in combination</u> can be considered to set a framework for consent for future development of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 2011/92<sup>2</sup>”</p>	<p>Refer to <b>[Appendix B]</b> for comparison between 2025 Apartment Guidelines SPPRs (new) with 2023 Apartment Guidelines SPPRs (now withdrawn).</p> <p>Refer to <b>[Appendix C]</b>, for consideration of 2025 SPPRs ‘in combination’ with 2018 SPPRs in ‘Height Guidelines’ and 2024 SPPRs in ‘Compact Settlement Guidelines’.</p>
<p>“This <u>consideration is limited to the SPPRs</u>, as they are the only sections of the draft Guidelines which could be considered to have any possible binding effects on the consent authorities”.</p>	<p>The 2025 Guidelines state that <i>“where SPPRs are stated in this document, they take precedence over any conflicting policies and objectives of statutory plans.”</i></p> <p>However, the 2025 Guidelines may be interpreted as including other mandatory requirements beyond the SPPRs and under the legislation Planning Authorities must <i>‘have regard to them’<sup>3</sup></i>.</p> <p>Therefore, the guidelines may have effect beyond the Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs).</p> <p>These potentially mandatory requirements are extensive and may further impact the nature of the development, including in terms of building occupancy/ plot density/ public health, building regulation compliance, safety criteria, etc.</p> <p>As examples:</p> <p>(1) <b>Space standards:</b> <i>“Duplex accommodation shall provide the additional floor area required to provide for stairways and landings”</i> (not in SPPR).</p> <p>(2) <b>Space standards:</b> <i>“Accordingly, at least 25% of units within a development shall exceed the minimum sizes set out in SPPR2</i></p>

Department of Housing letter, Dated 12 June 2025	Commentary
	<p><i>by 10%, with the potential for more than 25% of units to exceed the sizes set out in SPPR2 to be provided as required on a scheme-by-scheme basis in apartment schemes in more suburban locations, social housing developments, social and affordable housing delivered under Part V and schemes to provide housing for older persons and/or persons with disabilities” (not in SPPR).</i></p> <p><i>(3) <b>Space standards:</b> “Where between 10 to 49 residential units are proposed, the above [i.e. minimum floor area] <u>shall generally apply</u>, but in order to allow for flexibility, it may be assessed on a case-by-case basis”(not in SPPR).</i></p> <p><i>(4) <b>Storage:</b> “Where secure, allocated storage is provided in addition to that provided within individual units, it may be used to satisfy up to half of the minimum storage requirement for individual apartment units, but <u>shall not serve to reduce the minimum floor area</u>” and “Note: Where secure, allocated storage is provided in addition to that within individual units, it may be used to satisfy up to half of the minimum storage requirement for individual apartment units, but <u>shall not serve to reduce the minimum floor area</u> required to be provided within each individual apartment unit, as set out in these Guidelines”. (not in SPPR).</i></p> <p><i>(5) <b>Amenity:</b> “Private amenity space <u>shall be provided</u> in the form of gardens or patios/terraces for ground floor apartments and balconies or terraces at upper levels. Where provided at ground level, private amenity space <u>shall incorporate boundary treatment</u> appropriate to ensure privacy and security. Private amenity space <u>should be located to optimise solar orientation and designed to minimise overshadowing and</u></i></p>

Department of Housing letter, Dated 12 June 2025	Commentary
	<p>overlooking. <u>Balconies should adjoin and have a functional relationship with the main living areas of the apartment.</u>" (not in SPPR).</p> <p><b>(6) Waste:</b> "Provision <u>shall be made for the storage and collection of waste materials in apartment schemes. Waste storage facilities shall be accessible to each apartment stair/lift core and designed with regard to the projected level of waste generation and ensure adequate containers can be provided for residual, recyclable and food waste, to comply with waste management legislation, at designated waste storage points. Within apartments, there should be adequate provision for the temporary storage of segregated materials prior to deposition in communal waste storage and in-sink macerators are discouraged as they place a burden on drainage systems.</u>" (not in SPPR)</p> <p><b>(7) Cycle Parking:</b> "Cycle parking <u>shall be the subject of a funded maintenance regime that ensures that facilities are kept clean, free of graffiti, well-lit and the parking equipment will be properly maintained. It is essential, therefore, that as far as possible cycle parking is low maintenance, easy to use and easy and attractive to use by residents. Planning authorities should ensure that development proposals incorporate details on the provision of and access to cycle storage facilities at planning application stage by the development proposer. Appropriate conditions in relation to the operation and maintenance of the cycle storage facilities should be attached to any grant of permission for apartment developments.</u>" (not in SPPR)</p> <p><b>(8) Building Lifecycle Report:</b> "Accordingly, planning applications for apartment development <u>shall include a building lifecycle report which in turn includes an</u></p>

Department of Housing letter, Dated 12 June 2025	Commentary
	<p><i>assessment of long term running and maintenance costs as they would apply on a per residential unit basis at the time of application, as well as demonstrating what measures have been specifically considered by the proposer to effectively manage and reduce costs for the benefit of residents.”</i></p> <p><b>(9) Mix of Typologies:</b> <i>“When identifying areas suitable for higher densities, <u>consideration should also be given to the mix of housing typologies that can be provided</u>” (not in SPPRs)</i></p> <p><b>(10) Parking:</b> <i>“For all types of location, where it is sought to eliminate or reduce car parking provision, it is necessary to ensure, where possible, the provision of an appropriate number of drop off, service, visitor parking spaces and parking for the mobility impaired. On-site or proximate spaces <u>should also be prioritised</u> for use by mobility impaired persons and leased on a demonstrated needs basis rather than being sold with units” and “Where any underground car parking is proposed, such facilities <u>must be well lit and adequately ventilated</u>. Where surface parking is provided, it <u>should be clearly accessible</u> to the entrance to, and where appropriate, overlooked by, the units it serves”. (not in SPPRs).</i></p> <p><b>(11) Occupancy:</b> It is stated that a studio apartment is <u>“generally provided for a single person”</u>, which suggests that two or more persons may be permitted to occupy a 32m2 studio. This would result in a higher building occupancy than is stated in the SPPR standard.</p> <p><b>(12) Storage:</b> <i>“Provision <u>shall be made</u> for the storage and collection of waste materials in apartment schemes” and “Apartment unit schedules <u>should detail proposed private amenity space and</u></i></p>

Department of Housing letter, Dated 12 June 2025	Commentary
	<p><i>internal (and any external) storage space associated with each apartment” and ““Minimum requirements for storage areas are set out in Appendix 1 and are intended to accommodate household utility functions such as clothes washing and the storage of bulky personal or household items”. (not in SPPRs).</i></p>
<p><i>“a) Location - <u>There are no SPPRs concerning the location of apartment projects in the draft Guidelines.</u> “The draft Guidelines do not provide any national criteria or detailed rules for the location of apartment projects – that is an aspect that is <u>required to be addressed by the planning authority in statutory plans such as the local authority development plan”.</u> “There is no geographic specificity for the draft Guidelines, as they are national in their application. Although the draft Guidelines note that, “In general terms, <u>apartments are most appropriately located within urban areas”</u>, they do not require this <u>and allow for apartment projects to be planned for other locations (Section 2.3)”</u></i></p>	<p>The 2025 SPPRs concern the location of <i>all apartment projects</i>, in all parts of Ireland including environmentally sensitive locations where changing the nature of the development may have significant impacts.</p> <p>Further, the 2025 SPPRs are binding on local authorities and take precedence over development plans and previous Strategic Environmental Assessment of other Guidelines, local authority development plans and local area plans<sup>4</sup>. Therefore the effect of the SPPRs is to have particular impacts as a factor of location.</p> <p><b>(1) Locational impact:</b> The effect of the Guidelines is to remove any location-dependent variation in the planning framework between Planning Authorities, and even within functional areas. Therefore, there is a locational effect in that the guidelines derogates from the existing framework that sets location-specific rules.</p> <p>Previously, Planning Authorities could adopt specific rules in development plans around the subject matter of the SPPRs, such as to give effect to the Housing Need and Demand Assessments (HNDAs), or other local need, including a requirement for ‘communal, community and cultural facilities’ under SPPR 6 2025. However, the 2025 guidelines remove the possibility of local rules, override existing local rules on apartment size and mix etc, and apply as a blanket framework throughout the country.</p>

Department of Housing letter, Dated 12 June 2025	Commentary
	<p>(2) <b>Environmental Impact:</b> Under the Directive, “the environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by projects must be considered” and location includes: <u>“existing land use; the relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area; the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to the following areas: wetlands; coastal zones; mountain and forest areas; nature reserves and parks; areas classified or protected under Member States’ legislation; special protection areas designated by Member States pursuant to Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (*) and to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (7); areas in which the environmental quality standards laid down in Union legislation have already been exceeded; densely populated areas; landscapes of historical, cultural or archaeological significance”</u></p> <p>Following from (1) above, locational factors are directly relevant to environmental impacts.</p>
<p>b) Nature - <u>There are no SPPRs concerning the nature of apartment projects in the draft Guidelines. The principle of apartment projects is already established prior to the application of the draft Guidelines, which state: “Matters relating to density and other factors that further inform the principle of undertaking apartment development at an individual site are set out in the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024)”.</u>The zoning and land uses in relation to apartment</p>	<p>Refer to <b>[Appendix A]</b> for examples of changes permitted under 2025 SPPRs that may significantly affect density, occupancy, resource demands, sustainability, energy load, etc.</p> <p>Within the same building size (footprint and form), the ‘size’ and ‘nature’ of the environmental impact of the development may vary considerable, such as due to changes in occupancy, intensification of use, etc.</p>

Department of Housing letter, Dated 12 June 2025	Commentary
<p><i>projects are prescribed in the statutory plan, e.g., the local authority development plan, and the densities (which determine land take and number of units) and parameters for siting of apartment projects are determined under the SRDCSGs (Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines)”<sup>5</sup></i></p>	<p>Under the 2025 SPPRs “<i>the densities (which determine land take and number of units)</i>” may change substantially, and may significantly diverge from the 2024 SPPRs, within the same building footprint and form.</p>
<p><i>c) Size - There are <u>no SPPRs concerning the size of an apartment project in the draft Guidelines. The size and scale of an apartment project is already addressed through both the local authority development plan (extent, area) and through existing Section 28 guidelines on densities for residential developments (the SRDCSGs) and building heights (the Building Height Guidelines).</u></i></p> <p><i>The SPPRs in the draft Guidelines <u>only address the size of individual apartments with respect to their minimum internal dimensions – floor area (SPPR 2) and height of ground floor units (SPPR 4) and for single study bedroom units and for kitchen/ dining/ living areas serving 10 and 12 persons within purpose-built student accommodations (SPPR 8) – and only for certain categories of apartment projects. These do not constitute criteria for the size of projects. For other categories of apartment projects, there are no standards for internal dimensions and it is left at the discretion of the planning authority to decide this upon a case-by-case basis.</u></i></p>	<p>‘Size’ and ‘scale’ seem here only to refer to a narrow interpretation of the building footprint and form. However, the impacts are broader, including:</p> <p>(1) <b>the environmental impact of the building:</b> Refer to [Appendix A]. Even within the same building form, environmental impacts may include (but not limited to)- changes to density/ occupancy; embodied carbon, construction labour and materials; traffic, car parking, bicycle parking and active travel; open space, private outdoor space, shared amenity space and public health; indoor environmental quality, safety, mental and physical health; provision for disability, access and ageing; provision for childcare facilities, play grounds and play space; provision for communal, community and cultural spaces; etc.</p> <p>(2) <b>apartment size impact:</b> the guidelines affect the size of individual apartments and rooms, and this in turn has environmental effects for the occupants, including those lists in (1) above.</p>
<p><i>d) Operating conditions - There are <u>no SPPRs concerning the operating conditions of apartment projects in the draft Guidelines. The operating conditions for any apartment development at the project level would be determined by the relevant local</u></i></p>	<p>‘Operating conditions’ includes the demands of heating/ cooling/ air circulation; lift operation; sprinkler systems (fire suppression); construction material resource; land resources; management and security; etc.</p>

Department of Housing letter, Dated 12 June 2025	Commentary
<p><i>authority on a case-by-case basis. The Minister is precluded under Section 34 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 from mandating any conditions that apply to a planning permission for any development, including apartments, as this is a prescribed function of the planning authorities.</i></p> <p><i>Under Section 30 of the Act, the Minister cannot comment on individual planning applications. <u>Therefore, the draft Guidelines do not provide any standard planning conditions for general use on operating conditions.</u> Furthermore, as stated in Section 6.3 of the draft Guidelines, the Multi-Unit Developments Act, 2011 (MUD Act) already governs the general maintenance requirements for all apartment schemes nationally.</i></p>	<p>The environmental impact is a factor of the building design, occupancy and operating conditions. Under the 2025 SPPRs, this may change as demonstrated in <b>[Appendix A]</b>.</p>
<p><i>e) Allocation of resources - There are no SPPRs concerning the allocation of resources for apartment projects in the draft Guidelines.</i></p>	<p>Refer to <b>[Appendix A]</b> for details of additional resources required when considered ‘per occupant’, where ‘indicative construction cost’ is used as a proxy for construction labour and materials. In this context ‘land use’ per occupant may also increase under the 2025 SPPRs, due to permitted changes in density.</p> <p>The re-configuration of apartment buildings under the 2025 SPPRs will require a re-allocation of resources.</p> <p>For example, where an apartment building is re-configured with a reduced occupancy, this will require additional land use to house people; and where an apartment building has a higher embodied carbon per occupant, this will have wider environmental impacts.</p>

**/END**

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<sup>1</sup> (Department of Housing, 2025) RECORD 4- Env\_Assessment\_for\_draft\_Apt\_Guidelines\_12.06.25.pdf

<sup>2</sup> ANNEX II, “Infrastructure Projects: 10. Urban development projects, including the construction of shopping centres and car parks” <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/92/oj/eng>

<sup>3</sup> (Oireachtas, 2000) Planning & Development Act 2000 Section 28 (2000): “(1) *The Minister may, at any time, issue guidelines to planning authorities regarding any of their functions under this Act and planning authorities shall have regard to those guidelines in the performance of their functions. (2) Where applicable, the Board shall have regard to any guidelines issued to planning authorities under subsection (1) in the performance of its functions*”

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/30/enacted/en/html?q=planning>

(Oireachtas, 2015) Planning Act, 2015 Section 2: “*Section 28 of the Principal Act is amended by inserting the following after subsection (1B): “(1C) Guidelines to which subsection (1) relates may contain specific planning policy requirements that, notwithstanding subsection (1), are required to be applied by planning authorities and the Board in the performance of their functions.”*”

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/63/enacted/en/html?q=planning&years=2015>

<sup>4</sup> (Department of Housing, 2025) Apartment Guidelines: “*The Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities “the Guidelines” constitute Ministerial Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) (“the Act”). Planning authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála are required to have regard to the Guidelines and are also required to comply with any specific planning policy requirements (SPPRs) of the Guidelines, within the meaning of Section 28 (1C) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) in carrying out their functions under the Act. Accordingly, where SPPRs are stated in this document, they take precedence over any conflicting policies and objectives of statutory plans<sup>1</sup>. Where such conflicts arise, such plans should be amended by the relevant planning authority to reflect the content of these Guidelines”*”

[https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Planning\\_Design\\_Standards\\_for\\_Apartments\\_080725\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/Planning_Design_Standards_for_Apartments_080725_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> (Dept Housing, 2024) Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/sustainable-residential-development-and-compact-settlements-guidelines-for-planning-authorities/>

## **Appendix F:**

### **Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI)**

High-quality design is essential to viable, sustainable housing and must not be sacrificed for short-term cost savings<sup>1</sup> 15 July 2025

“The RIAI notes the recent comments by Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, Jack Chambers on prioritising cost considerations over design in the delivery of buildings, as well as the new apartment guidelines announced last week by Minister for Housing, James Browne. We recognise the pressing challenges raised around the viability and affordability of housing delivery, which are key concerns shared by the RIAI. However, the recent statements appear to suggest a shift in direction to lower-quality solutions driven by short term expediency, rather than long term vision and sustainable solutions that deliver real value for money.

It is critical that we get this right. We are deeply concerned that moves to relax key design safeguards risk undermining the creation of sustainable, high-quality living environments and will create future long-term challenges for apartment owners and tenants. The new guidance will allow for development of apartment blocks with single typologies which is completely at odds with the previous work of the Department of Housing to strengthen the sustainable communities approach to delivering homes.

There is evidence that, over time, the cumulative effects of poorly sized and designed homes can contribute to social inequality and reduce overall productivity. It may also diminish Ireland’s international competitiveness, particularly in retaining talent who value quality of life. The new proposals also risk causing further delays to delivery of new housing projects as options are reassessed and new designs commissioned, which will take time to work through.

The RIAI agrees that action is urgently needed to accelerate housing delivery; however, there are other ways of addressing this. In Dublin, land prices are one of the single biggest contributors to the high cost of building homes, partly driven by speculation on land assets as a commodity. While not the only factor, they significantly affect affordability, feasibility, and development timelines. The RIAI believes a better, and more sustainable approach, is for the government to seek greater control of land values in the first instance.

Making better use of existing infrastructure that already benefits from essential services like water, heat, electricity, schools, and shops also presents a real opportunity to speed up supply. In this regard, we need to continue incentivising the adaptation and reuse of existing vacant and derelict buildings and properties across the country, including vacant office spaces. (*\*The vacancy rate for Dublin office spaces is now at 17.5% according to Savills 2025 Market Outlook Report*). The RIAI is advocating for increased resources to be deployed within our local authority housing delivery staff to kick start immediate progress in this vital area.

The 2025 **RIAI Planning and Development Policy**<sup>2</sup> document sets out key strategies to enable improved delivery of our housing and infrastructure needs. This policy also addresses the significant costs associated with prolonged planning and bureaucracy, which must be addressed as a matter of urgency to allow projects in the public interest to proceed without unnecessary obstacles.

Action is urgently needed to accelerate housing delivery, but a broader perspective and range of actions is necessary. The recommendations of the Housing Commission highlight this broader perspective. They emphasise that housing policy must be based on robust assessments of societal need and should account for the full economic and social costs of not meeting Ireland’s housing requirements, including the long-term costs of poor-quality planning. They also stress the importance of enabling infrastructure to support sustainable, well-designed development.

The government’s **National Policy on Architecture – ‘Places for People’ (2022)**<sup>3</sup> explicitly prioritises quality and long-term value over short-term cost in the design and delivery of our public building infrastructure. It challenges the traditional lowest-cost procurement model, advocating instead for approaches that consider life-cycle value, design excellence, and sustainable outcomes that benefit communities across Ireland.

The RIAI is available to engage with Ministers, Departments, and all stakeholders to support changes that will improve quality and speed up delivery. As architects, we remain committed to helping meet Ireland’s housing needs by ensuring we build not only more homes, but more enduring, inclusive, and sustainable places and homes that deliver real long-term value for our people.

The RIAI is the professional body for architects in Ireland, supporting and regulating architects to ensure the highest standards in the built environment. Our members work across the full breadth of the construction industry, playing a vital role in the public and private sectors. They are at the forefront of designing and delivering the homes, schools, workplaces, and civic spaces that shape our communities, projects that prioritise sustainability, safety, and quality of life.”

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<sup>1</sup> (Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, 2025) RIAI Statement on Apartment Guidelines <https://mailchi.mp/riai.ie/riai-statement-high-quality-design-is-essential-to-viable-sustainable-housing-and-must-not-be-sacrificed-for-short-term-cost-savings?e=14ffe56cae>

<sup>2</sup> (Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, 2025) RIAI Policy on Planning and Development Management <https://www.riai.ie/discover-architecture/riai-policy-on-planning-and-development-management>

<sup>3</sup> (Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage 2022) Places for People, The National Policy on Architecture <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/places-for-people-the-national-policy-on-architecture/>

## **Appendix G:**

### **Irish Planning Institute (IPI)**

Statement on revised apartment standards<sup>1</sup> 11 July 2025

“The Irish Planning Institute (IPI), the all-island professional membership organisation representing professional planners, has said there is considerable “disquiet” among planners over the proposed changes outlined in the *Planning Design Standards for Apartments: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* published this week and the associated *Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2025*.

Gavin Lawlor, President of the Irish Planning Institute, said

“Professional planners not only recognise the gravity of the housing crisis — we are actively working to be part of the solution. We welcome meaningful, evidence-based reforms that support the accelerated, coordinated, and sustainable delivery of apartments and homes in communities across the country.

“While we all share the Minister’s priorities of bringing development costs down and accelerating housing delivery, we are not convinced that the announced changes will achieve what’s intended.

“In particular, the erosion of unit mix requirements represents a market-led approach to housing that is fundamentally at odds with the significant work undertaken by the Department of Housing to date to create a plan-led system with high quality, long term sustainable outcomes flowing from transparently and democratically adopted local development plans.

“This, and allowing changes to already permitted developments, also risks introducing more legal unpredictability.

“Our members understand the motivation to make unviable housing projects deliverable, however our members are deeply concerned about the potential unintended consequences of the Minister’s actions.

“Simply presenting these revised guidelines and the legislation as a *fait d’accompli* is regrettable, and it has caused significant disquiet among members of the Irish Planning Institute. Professional planners are as always available to work with the Minister and his officials to deliver sustainable housing and we will work with them to mitigate any unintended consequences of the announced changes.”

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<sup>1</sup> (Irish Planning Institute, 2025) <https://ipi.ie/2025/07/11/statement-on-revised-apartment-standards/>



## UCD School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy

Written Submission to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government.

This submission is in response to a public consultation on “Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities” published in December 2017.

### Summary

This submission specifically responds to a number of critical assumptions and conjecture included in the consultation documents. The consultation does not include supporting evidence<sup>1</sup>, an impact analysis or risk assessment of these proposed policy changes. The rationale for some of the policy changes is based on flawed understanding of speculative development of housing and the relationship between planning policy and land markets. There are risks of delay to planned development and inflationary effects on land prices that have not been assessed.

The stated objective is for new apartment planning standards that *“are compatible with economically viable housing supply in our major urban areas, based on people’s incomes and what they can afford in terms of rents and/or mortgages.”*

In the context of the guidelines introduced two years ago and in the absence of independent empirical evidence, the justification for further changes is not clear.

In late 2015, the DHPLG objective was to reduce standards *“aiming to [apartment] price points around the €200,000-€260,000 mark”*. In this consultation, the DHPLG objective is *“geared towards an outline affordability range of between €240,000 and €320,000”*.

This moving target for sales prices from €260,000 to €320,000 (for a 2 bedroom apartment in Dublin) confirms that market inflation in residential property cannot be mitigated through reducing design standards. Hard construction costs have increased only marginally in this two-year period and construction tender inflation was only 6.3% in 2016 and 6.2% in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

The policy objective is stated as improving ‘viability’ for developers, not ‘affordability’ for purchasers. It is questionable whether Planning legislation *“in the interests of the common good, for the proper planning and development of cities, towns and other areas, whether urban or rural”*<sup>3</sup> is appropriate for supporting speculative commercial transactions. This is particularly the case when the ‘viability’ of a business strategy is different for every site and when underpinning financial information is not open to scrutiny as it is commercially sensitive.

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<sup>1</sup> The research underpinning this public consultation has not been published contrary to the consultation document. An Executive Summary was made available a number of hours before the submission deadline.

[http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/draft\\_update\\_of\\_planning\\_guidelines\\_on\\_apartments\\_2018.pdf](http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/draft_update_of_planning_guidelines_on_apartments_2018.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> SCSi

<sup>3</sup> Planning and Development legislation <http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/legislation/planning-acts>

## 1. Construction costs, development costs and inflation

Proposed changes in standards, such as parking, density, storage and circulation cores, will result in a marginal (if any) reduction in hard *construction costs* and in many cases no reduction in *development costs*.

In speculative development any financial savings from construction costs are unlikely to be passed on to the purchaser. Property prices are primarily a factor of market demand, not development costs. In a rising property market, reductions in development costs do not result in any reduction in sales and rental prices. This is evidenced by the CSO who report that “*house price index rose by over 17% in the 5-year period from 2002 to 2007 while house prices increased by almost 65% in the same period.*”<sup>4</sup>

**Property Price Inflation:** Since the 2015 DHCLG changes in apartment standards, inflation on residential property has increased substantially; this closes ‘viability gaps’ and increases profitability for developers. Residential *property prices* have increased nationally by more than 12% in 2017<sup>5</sup> and are predicted to rise a further 8-10% in 2018. In this context, there will likely be a €32,000 *annual increase* on a sales price of a €320,000<sup>6</sup> apartment.

In order to keep pace with this rate of increase in market prices, hard construction costs would have to be *reduced* by 20% this year to mitigate property price inflation: This is clearly untenable as public policy and indicates that reducing planning standards to close a ‘viability gap’ is unsustainable and unnecessary in a rising market.

**Construction Costs:** Independent industry research confirms that indicative *construction costs* for apartments in Ireland are no higher than they were ten years ago<sup>7</sup>. Hard construction costs make up less than 50% of development costs for developer-built apartments<sup>8</sup>. Even marginal reductions in construction costs through design<sup>9</sup> will result in significant loss of quality and amenity over the 100-year lifetime of the housing. Housing design is a long term capital investment in social infrastructure.

The relationship between *development costs* and *construction costs* is also complex. In some cases, the proposed planning changes would result in higher development costs, thus negating any savings in hard construction costs.

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<sup>4</sup> CSO Construction and Housing in Ireland, 2008 Edition

<http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/construction/current/constructhousing.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> CSO Residential Property Price Index, 2017 <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-rppi/residentialpropertypriceindexnovember2017/>

<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this exercise, a development cost of €320,000 is assumed on the basis of SCSi breakdown for a suburban medium rise 2-bedroom apartment. [https://www.scsi.ie/documents/get\\_lob?id=1338&field=file](https://www.scsi.ie/documents/get_lob?id=1338&field=file)

<sup>7</sup> As an example, AECOM advise cost range of €1,600-2,000/m<sup>2</sup> ex VAT for 2018. This compares to higher costs of €1,800-2,400/m<sup>2</sup> ex VAT published by the same cost consultants in 2010.<sup>7</sup> SCSi confirm that tender inflation in 2016 and 2017 has brought prices back to the level that they were at in 2004.

<sup>8</sup> SCSi The Real Cost of Apartment Construction 2017

[https://www.scsi.ie/documents/get\\_lob?id=1338&field=file](https://www.scsi.ie/documents/get_lob?id=1338&field=file)

<sup>9</sup> As an example, a 1% saving in hard construction costs results in only a 0.5% (average €1,600<sup>9</sup>) saving on development costs.

As examples:

- fewer lift/ stair cores mean that apartment buildings have to be built in larger phases, thus increasing finance costs and delaying occupation of completed units. In many cases, any saving on additional lifts is off-set by the additional financial cost of programming and financing larger phases.
- basement and ground floor storage space is more expensive to construct than internal store rooms in apartments;
- Smaller units (studio, 1-bedroom apartments) are proportionately more expensive to construct because there are more high-value components required per occupant in the building (kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, heating, service runs etc.).

**Construction Programming:** In relation to accelerating delivery, the consultation is incorrect in stating that: *“A key aspect of the BTR [build to rent] is its potential to accelerate the delivery of new housing at a significantly greater scale than at present. For traditional housing, the pace of development is largely determined by the rate at which individual homes, including apartments, can be sold. With BTR, once constructed, the overall scheme is available to the rental sector over a much shorter timescale on completion and the investment model is therefore capable of delivering a much higher volume of housing than traditional models”*.

The construction programme of apartments is the same, whether build-to-let or for-sale. This is not a valid basis for creating a new class of residential development in the planning legislation or for prioritising one form of tenure in planning policy.

## 2. Land values, planning policy and competing development

The consultation document introduces new and *competing* classes of residential development (i.e. student housing, co-living, build-to-rent). Planning policy that promotes high-yield small-unit residential buildings increases land values, incentivises land speculation and adds cost. This will further squeeze out traditional apartment development as less ‘viable’ than the more profitable alternatives. These competing alternatives are considerably more profitable for investors and as a result higher prices can be paid for land. The consequence is that alternatives more profitable and traditional apartment development is less ‘viable’.

The introduction of competing alternatives is exacerbated further by the competing uses having fewer planning requirements for Part V (social housing), crèche provision, parking, amenity etc. than traditional apartments.

Over-provision and over-concentration of small high-yield units is not conducive to proper planning and development, sustainable mixed communities and the long-term housing need.

Planning controls (and future tenure controls) for co-housing and shared housing typologies would be more appropriate as *hotel or apart-hotel use class*, rather than creating a new category of residential building competing with apartment development.

### 3. Housing strategies, housing need and sustainable development

**Obligations of Local Authorities:** Under the Planning & Development Act<sup>10</sup>, each local authority is required to prepare a housing strategy that takes into account: *“the need to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households, as may be determined by the planning authority, and including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities”*.

The consultation document is in conflict with the obligations of local authorities under the Act to provide for local need, on the basis that: *“research work undertaken by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government with input from industry and construction professionals analysing the cost of housing delivery, confirms that in a given apartment scheme that includes a proportion of three-bedroom units, replacing these units to allow larger number of one- and two-bedroom units would, contribute to greater scheme viability”*.

This is also contrary to another part of the consultation document that states: *“It is.. critical to ensure that apartment living is an increasingly attractive and desirable housing option for a range of household types and tenures”*

Setting mandatory standards at national level and introducing frequent changes that *“must take precedence over any conflicting, policies and objectives of development plans and local area plans”* is not compatible with the obligation of a local authorities to prepare a Development Plan, Housing Strategy and Local Area Plans.

**Demographics:** The consultation document includes policy based on *national* demographic trends that are not appropriate. Local authorities have a statutory obligation to plan for local housing need specific to the demographics and taking into account the existing housing stock.

The consultation document states that: *“Demographic trends indicate that two-thirds of households added to those in Ireland since 1996 comprise 1-2 persons, yet only 21% of dwellings completed in Ireland since then comprise apartments of any type”*. This is not an accurate representation of the specific housing need in each local authority, particularly in urban areas.

For example, research confirms that in parts of inner city Dublin more than 50% of homes have two rooms or less<sup>11</sup> and there is a need to for larger apartments in new developments in many established communities such as this to redress the balance and provide for continuity.

**Quality:** Housing mix prevents overcrowding and transient communities. Space standards in housing in Ireland are amongst the lowest in Europe<sup>12</sup> and *“neighbourhood balance”* is needed to accommodate the needs of growing families<sup>13</sup> within the same locality.

Planning standards that increase corridor lengths, reduce lift/stair cores, remove requirements for dual-aspect apartments impact on the quality of life and safety of residents over the lifecycle of the building.

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<sup>10</sup> Planning and Development Act 2000, Section 96.

<sup>11</sup> Redrawing Dublin, Kearns, P. & Ruimy, M. 2010.

<sup>12</sup> The Case for Space, RIBA 2011 <https://www.architecture.com/-/media/gathercontent/space-standards-for-homes/additional-documents/ribacaseforspace2011pdf.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> CABE, 2010

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118111541/http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/space-standards-the-benefits.pdf>

## 4. Unintended consequences

**‘Back-door’ reductions in standards:** Future control of build-to-rent apartments is set out in the consultation document as a planning condition for: *“a proposed covenant or legal agreement further to which appropriate planning conditions may be attached to any grant of permission to ensure that the development remains as such. Such conditions include a requirement that the development remains owned and operated by an institutional entity and that this status will continue to apply for a minimum period of not less than 15 years and that similarly no individual residential units are sold or rented separately for that period.”*

It is not clear if Act<sup>14</sup> gives local authorities the powers to impose Planning Conditions relating to the future *tenure* of the building (or units within a building). It is unclear whether a build-to-rent apartment building can be restricted to a single ownership, whether this is open to legal challenge, or whether effective enforcement of this condition is possible under the Planning and Development Act. In the event that the property rights of owners take precedence over a planning conditions the build-to-rent standards could be used as a back door to lower standards for all apartment development.

**Industry delay and capacity:** Ongoing and repeated changes to planning policy and standards delay development and discourage investors because of uncertainty about their own business propositions and those of their competitors. At this stage of the development cycle this will result in re-design of shovel-ready schemes in order to maximize development potential. This will add additional professional, regulatory and finance fees to the cost of development, thus negating any saving in hard construction costs.

**Lack of certainty:** The consultation document does not include a risk-assessment of the impact of introducing disruptors in the land market by removing existing planning controls, stating that *“there is a need for greater flexibility, removing restrictions that result in different approaches to apartment mix on the one hand, and to other forms of residential accommodation on the other.”*

Planning policy that is open to interpretation and standards that are unprescriptive are drivers of land speculation and repeated planning applications to increase land values. This delays supply, puts pressure on institutions and impacts on affordability.

Each local authority has prepared a Development Plan, including a Housing Strategy, for a period of 6-years; this sets the long-term plan for the proper planning and development of their area. Importantly, this gives certainty to developers about standards and a reassurance of a level-playing pitch with competitors, all of which is a brake on land speculation. Setting mandatory standards at national level and making frequent changes undermines this.

Reference is made in the consultation document to building regulation standards: Building Control a separate body of legislation, subject to other regulatory controls and it is not appropriate to include building regulation requirements in mandatory planning standards.

**Evidence base for policy:** The outcome of the invited industry consultation that underpins this policy initiative has not been made available for analysis. **/END**

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January 2018.

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<sup>14</sup> Planning and Development Act 2000, Section 34 (4).

# “High density, low standards- the impact of deregulation on urban inclusivity and housing affordability in Ireland”



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## Introduction

Ireland has a housing crisis that has been declared a national emergency<sup>1</sup>. The lack of availability of suitable housing has manifested in rising purchase prices and rents, which in turn has contributed to a rise in homelessness and housing distress.

In the years 2015-2020 housing standards were changed with the objective of incentivising housing development. This included reductions in apartment quality, amenity and space standards<sup>2</sup>; the deregulation<sup>3</sup> of new housing typologies including accommodation called ‘co-living’ (bedrooms with shared facilities); and a removal of height limits for new buildings.

One consequence of this deregulation is that permanent ‘homes’ now include rooms of 12m<sup>2</sup>, smaller than a standard car parking space. Additional storage space, outdoor amenity and parking are all negotiable, with guidance for communal kitchen and living rooms. A housing charity has described co-living as “21st-century bedsits<sup>4</sup> with a glossy makeover”<sup>5</sup>

Minimal spaces for city workers have been prioritised over sustainable, integrated and affordable urban communities, that are designed for the long term needs of the wider population and for the 50% of households that have children.<sup>6</sup>

This paper principally focuses on policy change in Dublin, the capital city, home to 25% of the population<sup>7</sup> (1,173,179 people). The Greater Dublin region where 40% live includes a large commuter belt (counties Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow), and this is where the housing crisis is most acute and where policy change has the most impact.

In a speculative market, on which the state is largely reliant for the provision of housing, policy change is the lever that incentivises development. This can have a disruptive effect that is difficult to reverse. There are also economic consequences, because expectations translate into land value inflation, and consequently this impacts on affordability.

In the longer term, however, there are environmental impacts, because the type and location of housing must support sustainable urban growth. Government policy is cognisant<sup>8</sup> that “one of the patterns from the past that needs to be avoided in the future is the long-standing tendency for the development sector, if left unmanaged, to prefer housing provision in peripheral or greenfield sites on the edges of urban areas over brownfield or re-development opportunities to a disproportionate and undesirable level.”

The risk is that if city apartments become sub-optimal and undesirable, that families are again displaced into the commuter belt in search of space and affordability. The new city housing then risks becoming transient communities, and disadvantaged families in overcrowded homes. Short-term incentives can have long term social, environmental and economic costs.

## Background & Context

The roots of the crisis are in the a speculative property and banking crisis<sup>9</sup> (from 2007), that lead to a collapse in construction which was most acute in the residential sector. The supply of new homes fell from a peak of over 93,000 in 2006 to fewer than 4,600 in 2013.<sup>10</sup>

In response, a five-year national housing policy was launched in 2016: 'Rebuilding Ireland'<sup>11</sup> had five pillars, one of which 'Build More Homes'<sup>12</sup> aimed for the construction of 125,000 new houses and apartments. It included a series of policy and regulatory changes to incentivise the construction of new build homes. In the following years, construction output increased, although short of the targets, with 83,798 new homes being built to the end of 2020. A new national housing policy 'Housing for All' is to be launched in mid 2021.

In the drive to increase housing supply, policy has been to increase the number of 'units', with a particular focus on housing for particular demographics (students, high-earning migrant workers, first time buyers, etc.), and in particular regions (Dublin, major regional cities and commuter belts). By 2021 up to 80% of new dwellings were in urban areas<sup>13</sup>, and 75% (10,385)<sup>14</sup> of all new apartments were in Dublin.

Social housing is delivered through a number of direct and indirect mechanisms, including this private speculative supply. In the years 2017-20 of total 16% of all new homes were built or acquired for social housing<sup>15</sup>, comprising 5,335 directly built by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHB), and 10,000 'turnkey'<sup>16</sup> purchases of newly built homes on private land.

An affordable housing scheme that had operated from 2000 to provide housing at below market rates was set aside in 2015<sup>17</sup>. However, a new affordable housing purchase scheme has been proposed in 2021<sup>18</sup>, that will also be predominantly delivered through private development.

## Demographics

The Economic and Social Council (ESRI) estimate a need for 26,000 -33,000 new homes annually based on population level assumptions about future trends in mortality, fertility and net migration, which in turn is based on assumptions of future economic activity<sup>19</sup>.

However, specific local assessment in each of thirty-one local authorities is by means of a 'Housing Strategy'<sup>20</sup>: This is a statutory processes that assesses and plans for *"the existing need and the likely future need for housing; the need to ensure that housing is available for persons who have different levels of income; the need to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households, as may be determined by the planning authority, and including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities; the need to counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds"*

A new methodology for local authorities to undertake a Housing Need and Demand Assessments (HNDA) was published in 2021.<sup>21</sup> In the Dublin region, these are expected to be completed for incorporation in the Dublin City Development Plan (2022-28)<sup>22</sup>.

Ireland has a very young population, with one third of people under 25 years of age and one quarter under the age of 18 years. This is important in the context of housing provision, as more than 50% of all households have children (under 18 years), and more than 30% have two or more children<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, Ireland (7%) has more than double the EU average (3%) of homes with three or more children.<sup>24</sup>

Ireland is a geographically small country and 3/4 of students in higher education attend colleges within 50km of their homes of origin<sup>25</sup>. Consequently, a very high proportion of 18-24 year olds in education continue to live with their families, particularly in the cities.

During the five years 2011-2016 the number of working adults living at home increased by 19% (to 215,088) and this trend has been attributed to the housing crisis<sup>26</sup>. In total, 458,874 adults (almost 10% of the population) were recorded as living with a parent in 2016.

Despite the statutory provisions to consider all housing need, it is notable that the Rebuilding Ireland Plan (2016-21) and subsequent implementation have not directly discussed the needs of families, children, young adults, multi-generational households or those with disabilities. The policy document mentions children only in the context of homelessness, which was particularly acute in 2016, the number of homeless children having tripled in the previous two years<sup>27</sup>.

A National Student Accommodation Strategy (from 2015) is also part of the broader housing policy. It has the intention to remove students from the private rental market, so as to make more housing available to families. The experience to date, however, is that up 80% of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) is actually occupied by international students<sup>28</sup>.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) has a target for *'at least 40% of all new housing to be delivered within the existing built-up areas of cities, towns and villages on infill and/or brownfield sites'*<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, the wider objective is for more sustainable and compact growth, a move away from the traditional unsustainable pattern of commuter-belt sprawl

## Regulatory change

Within the policy framework of the housing programme, Rebuilding Ireland (2016-21), a number of significant regulatory changes were made which impact on the system. In broad terms, certain types of housing and certain locations have been incentivised, generally favouring dense urban development of small apartments on the one hand, and more commuter-belt low-density houses on the other. The most substantial changes are as follows:

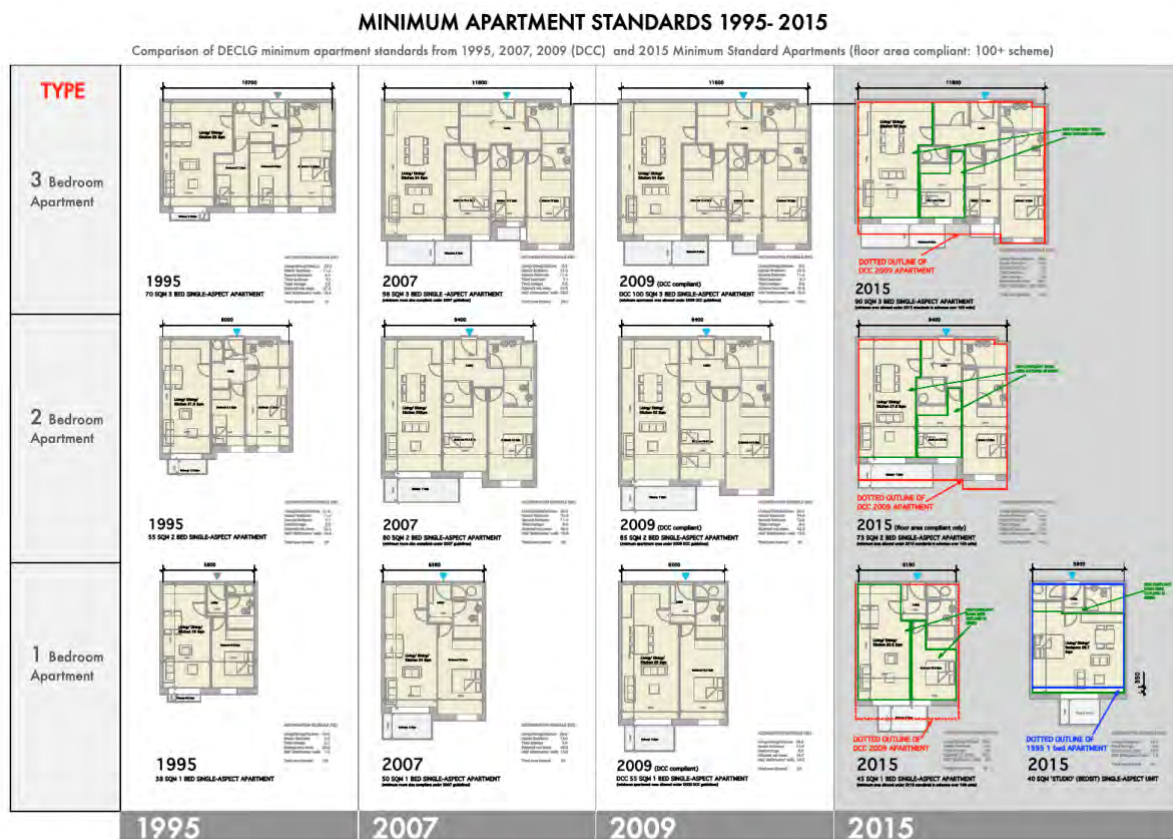
**2015 Urban Regeneration & Housing Act**<sup>30</sup> This legislation reduced the requirement for social housing in private developments. A 'Part V' requirement for social and affordable housing had been introduced in 2020; it required up to 20% of new housing developments of more than 4 houses and apartments to be available for social and affordable housing. In 2015, this was reduced to 10% social housing, for developments of more than 9 homes.

In addition, the 'Part V' requirement to transfer land or homes to the local authority at a reduced purchase price was amended to include long-term leasing arrangements, typically for 15, 20 or 25 years.

The effect of this has been that many developers favour leasing. Concerns have been expressed at the high cost of these leases<sup>31</sup>, and the future political and social impact of displacing communities of social tenants at the end of the leases.

**2015 Planning & Development (Amendment) Act<sup>32</sup>** In late 2015, a provision was introduced to allow the Minister to issue mandatory guidelines that are binding on Planning authorities and An Bord Pleannala<sup>33</sup> (the Planning appeals board). Under these ‘Section 28’ guidelines, Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) ‘take precedence over any conflicting, policies and objectives of development plans, local area plans and strategic development zone planning schemes’<sup>34</sup>. These new powers have been the mechanism to impose a series of regulatory changes:

**2015 Section 28- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments** Space standards (floor area, room sizes, private open space, storage, etc) were set for apartments on a national basis; these guidelines updated 2007 minimum standards, but in Dublin City (where most apartments are built) this had the effect of reducing standards established by the local authority in 2009. As an example, the 2-bedroom apartment standard in Dublin City Council was reduced from 85m<sup>2</sup> to 80m<sup>2</sup>, and ceiling heights on upper floors were lowered from 2.7m to 2.4m. Changes to requirements for lifts/ stairs<sup>35</sup>, dual-aspect apartments, ceiling heights, outdoor amenity areas and storage were also set. Studio (one room apartments) of minimum size 40m<sup>2</sup>, were also introduced and they were permitted to be up to 50% of units in certain developments. Apartments of this size had not previously been permitted in Dublin City, where the minimum had been 55m<sup>2</sup><sup>36</sup>.



Impacts of DECLG 2015 Standards on Apartment Cost, Affordability and Supply © January 2016 | MAOILIOSA REYNOLDS MRSJAI RIBA

Comparison analysis of minimum apartment standards, Maoiliosa Reynolds Architect

## 2018 Section 28 - Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments<sup>37</sup>

Further amendments were made to guidelines, most significantly the introduction of lower standards for 'build-to-rent' apartments (with limitations on sale of units for 15 years), and a new typology of 'co-living' (shared accommodation). For the first time different standards were set for apartment residents on the basis of their tenure.

A 'studio' (single room) home was further reduced to 37m<sup>2</sup>. In BTR, there is no requirement for private outdoor space such as terraces and balconies, and no requirement for car parking. Most importantly, the mandatory 'mix' of apartment sizes (as specified by local authorities for local need) was removed, meaning that developments could be all small apartments,

### Specific Planning Policy Requirement 8

For proposals that qualify as specific BTR development in accordance with SPPR 7:

- (i) No restrictions on dwelling mix and all other requirements of these Guidelines shall apply, unless specified otherwise;
- (ii) Flexibility shall apply in relation to the provision of a proportion of the storage and private amenity space associated with individual units as set out in Appendix 1 and in relation to the provision of all of the communal amenity space as set out in Appendix 1, on the basis of the provision of alternative, compensatory communal support facilities and amenities within the development. This shall be at the discretion of the planning authority. In all cases the obligation will be on the project proposer to demonstrate the overall quality of the facilities provided and that residents will enjoy an enhanced overall standard of amenity;
- (iii) There shall be a default of minimal or significantly reduced car parking provision on the basis of BTR development being more suitable for central locations and/or proximity to public transport services. The requirement for a BTR scheme to have a strong central management regime is intended to contribute to the capacity to establish and operate shared mobility measures;
- (iv) The requirement that the majority of all apartments in a proposed scheme exceed the minimum floor area standards by a minimum of 10% shall not apply to BTR schemes;
- (v) The requirement for a maximum of 12 apartments per floor per core shall not apply to BTR schemes, subject to overall design quality and compliance with building regulations.

Build-to-Rent apartment standards, 2018

**Co-Living** This reduced minimum standards to 12m<sup>2</sup> homes, with shared kitchen and living areas of 4-8m<sup>2</sup>/ person. These buildings have no requirement for car parking, outdoor amenity space or facilities for children and have limited provision of facilities for people with disabilities. (Co-living is discussed in more detail below).

**Specific Planning Policy Requirement 9**

Shared Accommodation may be provided and shall be subject to the requirements of SPPRs 7 (as per BTR). In addition,

- (i) No restrictions on dwelling mix shall apply;
- (ii) The overall unit, floor area and bedroom floorspace requirements of Appendix 1 of these Guidelines shall not apply and are replaced by Tables 5a and 5b;
- (iii) Flexibility shall be applied in relation to the provision of all storage and amenity space as set out in Appendix 1, on the basis of the provision of alternative, compensatory communal support facilities and amenities. The obligation will be on the project proposer to demonstrate the overall quality of the facilities provided and that residents will enjoy an enhanced overall standard of amenity;
- (iv) A default policy of minimal car parking provision shall apply on the basis of shared accommodation development being more suitable for central locations and/or proximity to public transport services. The requirement for shared accommodation to have a strong central management regime is intended to contribute to the capacity to establish and operate shared mobility measures;

Co-living (shared accommodation) standards, 2018

**2019 Section 28 Height Guidelines**<sup>38</sup> Under mandatory guidelines, building heights were also de-regulated. Previously, building height limits were set by local authorities and in Dublin this was generally 16-28m. This meant up to nine storeys for residential buildings in most of the city with five storeys permitted in more sensitive and historic areas, in recognition that *‘the intrinsic quality of Dublin as a low-rise city and considers that it should remain predominantly so. The vast majority of the city area is identified as not being suitable for mid-rise or taller buildings’*<sup>39</sup>

Although de-regulation had been claimed to be to address the housing crisis, the change applied to all buildings including offices and hotels. Since deregulation, permission has been sought (and in many cases granted) for buildings considerably taller than the previous limits.

***In accordance with Government policy to support increased building height and density in locations with good public transport accessibility, particularly town/ city cores, planning authorities shall explicitly identify, through their statutory plans, areas where increased building height will be actively pursued for both redevelopment, regeneration and infill development to secure the objectives of the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and shall not provide for blanket numerical limitations on building height.***

Height guidelines, 2019

**2017 Strategic Housing Development (SHD)** A further change moved the decision-making process for larger residential Planning applications (100 or more homes, or 200 or more student rooms<sup>40</sup>) and from the local authority to An Bord Pleanála (the Planning appeals board). Although stated to be on the basis of ‘fast tracking’ permission for housing, this had the effect of significantly reducing public participation, and moving the process outside the framework of democratically adopted Development Plans. The process was time-limited to the end of 2020, but has been extended to early 2022<sup>41</sup>.

## ‘Co-living’

Co-living (or more correctly ‘shared accommodation’) is a new form of rental accommodation that was introduced in 2018, purportedly for *“a specific renter cohort with specific needs or requirements from their housing provision. In particular, the usefulness of such an accommodation type to the dynamics in the urban employment market”*.

Whereas previously, housing was regulated for self-contained homes, these standards allow permanent rental housing to have shared facilities such as communal kitchens, laundry rooms and social areas. The rental arrangements are intended to include utilities, insurances and service charges for building cleaning, security, management and maintenance. In many ways they follow the typology of student accommodation (PBSA) or an apart-hotel, but for the purpose of long term housing.

Co-living is not required to have private or shared outdoor amenity space or a car parking provision. It is also not subject to the general requirement that a percentage of housing be reserved for social housing<sup>42</sup>.

During the pandemic, temporary permission has been granted to some student accommodation to change to this use, meaning it is not subject the usual restriction of 9- months student accommodation and 3-month tourist accommodation. One senator said this was a *“dangerous precedent for co-living by the back door.”*<sup>43</sup> As ‘co-living’ has been designed as ‘residential’ rather than hotel, it is permitted in residential zoning, where hotels would not generally be permitted due to potential impact on adjoining residents.

Whereas, students in purpose-built accommodation usually stay for defined terms (generally 12-15 weeks), co-living is not limited in duration and is a much broader demographic, without natural defined limits of academic terms. There has been some concern over rights of residents, as it was suggested that they may be given a licence agreement (similar to a hotel). Tenancy agreements, on the other hand are regulated<sup>44</sup> and subject to controls, including limits on rental increases in certain areas (‘Rent Pressure Zones’).

The private space in this housing is very limited and the 2018 guidelines permit rooms of 12m<sup>2</sup>, although more typically 16m<sup>2</sup> has been proposed by developers. This has been very controversial, labelled as *“21st-century bedsits<sup>1</sup> with a glossy makeover”<sup>2</sup>*, ‘shoe box living’ and ‘homes smaller than parking spaces’, with concerns about privacy, health and wellbeing of residents living in close proximity. In some cases kitchens are proposed to be shared by more than 40 people.

Shared Accommodation – minimum bedroom size	
Single* 12 m <sup>2</sup>	Double/twin* 18 m <sup>2</sup> *Including ensuite (bathroom)
Shared Accommodation – minimum common living and kitchen facilities floor area	
Bedrooms 1-3 8m <sup>2</sup> per person	Bedrooms 4-6 additional 4m <sup>2</sup> per person

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, 2020 Update

Over-crowding, issues of management, and security and public health concerns (amplified by the pandemic) have been raised. Living in close proximity to many others is damaging to mental health and well-being. In response to public concerns, some controls we introduced in 2020 following a review.<sup>45</sup> However effectively this a restriction rather than a ban<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Bedsit’: a one room apartment that is both bedroom and sitting room.

<sup>2</sup> Irish Examiner, 17 May 2019 <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/minister-criticised-for-backing-co-living-developments-to-help-solve-housing-crisis-925063.html>

## Impact of Regulatory Changes

The overall impact of the incremental changes has been significant. In broad terms, there is a reduction in housing quality and an increase in housing cost, as densification and de-regulation have fuelled speculation<sup>47</sup>, and out-competed traditional residential development. More generally, there has been very little evidence supporting policy changes and many significant moves have not been adequately interrogated or assessed for social, environmental and economic impacts

In this context, the type and location of new development is largely controlled by private developers, regardless of national targets or assessment of local needs. In advance of local needs assessments (HNDA), there has been a strong focus on national supply targets and numbers of ‘units’ without a wider discussion of the type, size, location and affordability of new housing.

A strong narrative for smaller homes, rather than family homes has been adopted including ‘the need for more 1 and 2 bedroom units in line with wider demographic and household formation trends’, with an untested assumption that minimum standards are adequate to all housing need. This follows the relatively recent concept of ‘under-occupancy, such as the United Kingdom policy to re-distribute social housing by means of a tax on un-occupied bedrooms<sup>48</sup>.

Space standards in housing in Ireland are amongst the lowest in Europe<sup>49</sup> and in fact the average new dwellings size index (nationally, houses and apartments) shows a reduction of 34% between 2011 and 2021<sup>50</sup>.

As the patterns of existing housing and demographics vary, so future local need is very spatially specific: For example, research confirms that in parts of inner city Dublin more than 50% of homes have two rooms or less<sup>51</sup>, so there is a need to for larger apartments in new developments in many established communities such as this to redress the balance and provide for continuity. In other suburban areas there are insufficient homes for smaller or ‘down-sizing’ households. In some localities, a “neighbourhood balance” is needed to accommodate the needs of growing families<sup>52</sup>.

In urban areas, the removal of the requirement for a ‘mix’ of apartment sizes, and the introduction of ‘studio’ (one room) and ‘co-living’ (shared accommodation) are therefore now being favoured, as they have higher returns on investment. Housing mix prevents overcrowding and transient communities.

<b>Estimate of distribution of Dwelling Size per bedroom required to meet projected demand</b>					
Number of bedrooms per dwelling unit	1-bed 55m2	2-bed 80m2	3-bed	4-bed	5-bed
Estimate of distribution of dwelling size per bedroom	20%	40%	30%	10%	5%

Estimate of the Distribution of Dwelling Size per Bedroom Required to Meet Projected Demand (Dublin City Council Development Plan, 2016-22)<sup>53</sup>

Number of bedrooms per dwelling	Co-living	Studio	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed
Estimate of distribution of dwelling size per bedroom	33%	5%	40%	15%	7%

Proposed mix on one Dublin development, 2021<sup>54</sup>

The reduction in mandatory requirements for larger apartments, means that supporting infrastructure for family homes can also now be ‘designed-out’ in many developments, particularly the provision of child-care facilities and outdoor play areas.

Under Planning regulations, new housing developments are required to provide childcare facilities (creches) as pre-school and after-school services for children on the basis of *‘one childcare facility per seventy-five dwellings is recommended (and a pro-rata increase for developments in excess of seventy-five houses)’*<sup>55</sup>. However, as developments of smaller apartments are now permitted there is an exemption as, *‘One-bedroom or studio type units should not generally be considered to contribute to a requirement for any childcare provision and subject to location, this may also apply in part or whole, to units with two or more bedrooms’*<sup>56</sup>.

These new standards allow apartment buildings with longer corridors, fewer lift/stair cores, and without private outdoor space (such as balconies, terraces or gardens) in build-to-rent developments. Such changes impact on the quality of life and safety of residents, that are not possible to remedy over the lifecycle of the building. In parallel with these changes, fire safety regulations<sup>57</sup> were changed to allow the removal of internal fire lobbies and to extend the minimum distance from apartments to an escape stairs. This, together with the removal of height limits, has raised concerns about the safety of upper storeys in tall buildings, where ladder rescue is not possible.

Furthermore, the reduction in dual-aspect apartments (i.e. windows on more than one side) impacts on health, well-being and safety, due to reduced daylight and sunlight and the absence of cross-ventilation. For example, the reduction in floor area and ceiling height for a 2-bedroom apartment in Dublin City means that the internal volume of air is almost 20% less than previously<sup>58</sup> in build-to-rent apartments. This has implications for public health (disease control), as well as the comfort, mental health and well-being of residents.

There are concerns that it is short-term ‘developer viability’, rather than long-term sustainability is driving housing policy. In fact, the stated aim has been for apartment standards that *“are compatible with economically viable housing supply in our major urban areas, based on people’s incomes and what they can afford in terms of rents and/or mortgages”*<sup>59</sup>.

In late 2015, the policy objective was to reduce standards *“aiming for [2-bedroom apartment] price points around the €200,000-€260,000 mark”*. By early 2018 this had increased to changes *“geared towards an outline affordability range of between €240,000 and 8 €320,000”*, and by 2021 the benchmark for apartments in the new ‘affordable housing scheme’ in Dublin was raised to €500,000<sup>60</sup>.

Affordability, in particular, has become a critical issue in cities with the median purchase price of new homes increasing by 22% in Dublin, and by 51% in Dublin City in three years (2018-21)<sup>61</sup>. Similarly rents have been increasing, and the ‘standardised rent’ in Dublin is now €1,745/month, up 14% from €1,527.

In this context, the European Commission has raised concerns about affordability and (having allowed for construction and land inflation), questions whether *‘high inflation values may be partly explained by an increase in margins, which may indicate insufficient competition’*<sup>62</sup>.

The residential sector has not re-built sufficient capacity to meet the delivery targets, and there are high barriers to entering the sector. Although the housing crisis is often presented as a supply crisis, the underlying issues are capacity and affordability. So, housing ‘targets’ that are substantially reliant on speculative property developers, results in uneven supply, price inflation and the risk of un-even and unpredictable development.

As prices have risen, fewer people have been able to meet their own housing needs and there is more pressure on the state to subsidise or support access to housing. More people are in housing distress and living in sub-standard and unsuitable housing. The cost of housing is also impacting on Ireland’s competitiveness.

However, on the other side a heavy reliance on private investment (to develop new housing) sets a context where government must insure that the market is attractive to investors and provides good returns, in the form of high rents and sales prices.

Balancing these two competing pressures is the driver of reduced standards, increased density, and deregulation in order to achieve ‘viability’, a point where the returns are sufficiently high to commit to a property investment. In the process, the wider and longer-term risks for society, the environment and the economy have not been adequately assessed.

### CASE STUDY - O’Devaney Gardens, Dublin

O’Devaney Gardens is a development site in the north city. It was formerly a social housing community, built in the mid-1950s<sup>63</sup>. The site extends to 5.06 hectares and is in an area of low-rise, traditional inner suburban housing.

Originally it was a community of social housing, and thirteen buildings of four storeys housed 272 families. These have now been demolished<sup>64</sup>, and the site has been transferred to a private developer for a scheme of private, social and affordable homes. The project has been controversial, primarily because of the method of procurement and the cost of the development arrangement. This has had a number of iterations, each increasing the density and height of buildings on the site. Five years ago it was proposed to build 480 homes on the site<sup>65</sup>, then 768 (2019), and most recently 1,047 (2021).

The current proposal is for 10 apartment blocks, one of 14 storeys in height and two others of 12 storeys. It will accommodate up to 3,700 residents at a density of over 734 persons/ hectare (based on full occupancy of bedrooms). This is more than three times the density of population in the original housing on the site, which had 1,116 residents (220 persons/ hectare).

	<b>Studio (1 px)</b>	<b>1-bedroom (2 px)</b>	<b>2-bedroom (4 px)</b>	<b>3-bedroom (5 px)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1954 social housing</b>	1 (1 px)	56 (112 px)	72 (288 px)	143 (715 px)	272 homes (1,116 px)
<i>% ‘mix’</i>	<i>0.4%</i>	<i>21%</i>	<i>26%</i>	<i>53%</i>	<i>100%</i>
<b>2021 proposal<sup>66</sup></b>	0 (0 px)	318 (636 px)	567 (2,268 px)	162 (810 px)	1,047 (3,714 px)
<i>% ‘mix’</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>100%</i>

Comparison of housing ‘mix’, O’Devaney Gardens, Dublin

It is notable that more than half of the original housing had three bedrooms, which is more flexible to family demographics, disability, caring, and working from home. The current proposal is for 16% of three-bedroom homes, with 84% of the apartments to be one- and two- bedroom apartments.

As a consequence of the high-density and tall building on the site, it has now been reported that up to 400 of these apartments may not have adequate daylight, due to the densification of the site and over-shadowing<sup>67</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The process of reducing standards does not impact evenly; the risk is that those with choice will continue the drift to the commuter belt in search of more space, amenity and affordability, in the absence of an urban alternative suitable for families.

In turn, this risks city housing that is not a suitable or attractive places to live; and in time, become transient communities, or insecure rental communities that are areas of disadvantage and over-crowding.

Architect and author Michael Sorkin says: *'the idea that there is a class of renter tenant who must ever trim their spaces to their demographic status is truly invidious.. an aspirational minimum is one thing; an on-going process of defining that minimum down.. betrays a lack of both imagination and compassion'*<sup>68</sup>.

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## Housing: Construction costs and affordability

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24 June 2022

### OPENING STATEMENT

Chairman, Committee Members. Thank you for the opportunity to attend this session today.

The purpose is to look at the construction costs and inflation in the context of housing delivery and affordability. We might ask: **“Are costs increasing?”** (they are), but the important questions are **“are costs making housing unaffordable?”** and **“what can be done about it?”**.

#### 1. Are costs increasing?

Tender prices reflect what the market will do the work for and are a factor of market conditions, economic cycles, risk and sentiment. The latest PMI<sup>1</sup> report says: *“construction firms continued to face severe delivery delays due to material shortages, shipping issues, the war in Ukraine and Brexit”*. The SCSI<sup>2</sup> report tender inflation of 13% in 2021, and the Office of Government Procurement<sup>3</sup> has introduced measures to manage contract inflation.



Table 1: Tender Price Index (SCSI, 2022)

Materials are just one part of a tender price. Although the SCSI index shows *tender* prices now 80% above 2010 prices, it is notable that this is only 30-40% above 2007 levels for non-residential work. The EuroStat<sup>4</sup> Construction Cost Index shows labour and material costs not significantly higher than 2007. However, this is a lagging indicator and the CSO<sup>5</sup> Wholesale Index shows prices are very volatile with significant inflation in some materials.

More broadly, the problem is uncertainty. Risk is being ‘priced in’ to tender prices. This can include risks such as: the pandemic, Brexit, availability and transportation of materials, energy costs, labour and skills shortages (design and construction), capacity constraints (industry and institutions), procurement practices, regulatory policy, delay in utilities and infrastructure, risk allocation in contracts, etc.

## 2. Are costs making housing unaffordable?

According to Department of Housing (2021 rates)<sup>6</sup>, ‘hard costs’ (labour and materials) are around €183,000 for a 3-bedroom house and €210,000 for a 2-bedroom apartment (incl. VAT). A material cost increase of 10% adds about €10,000 to a typical new home.

	3 – bedroom house (rural)		3– bedroom house (urban)		2– bedroom apartment	
	Construction	‘all-in’	Construction	‘all-in’	Construction	‘all-in’
<b>2016</b>	148,025	160,520.59	150,555.88	<b>190,867.65</b>	<b>200,726.47</b>	<b>166,689</b>
<b>2017</b>	154,050	167,223.53	157,064.71	<b>199,111.76</b>	<b>209,105.88</b>	<b>173,482</b>
<b>2019</b>	171,293	184,685.29	189,111.76	<b>243,476.47</b>	<b>234,570.59</b>	<b>196,336</b>
<b>2021</b>	183,229	197,867.65	205,526.47	<b>265,591.18</b>	<b>255,220.59</b>	<b>210,725</b>
<b>H1 2022<sup>1</sup></b>	192,390.45	207,761.03	215,802.79	275,867.50	265,113.97	219,886.45

Construction & ‘All In’ Costs (Department of Housing, 2021)

From 2010 to 2022, the median new house price<sup>7</sup> rose 9% nationally from €247,000 to €270,000 however, in Dublin it increased almost 50% from €305,000 to €450,000<sup>8</sup>. Outside the cities, private developers are currently selling new 3-bed homes from €235,000<sup>9</sup> and Department of Housing and local authority records confirm this order of cost.

So although inflation is an issue, building materials and regulatory standards are not what is making housing unaffordable. Development costs (‘soft costs’) can add up to €200,000 in speculative development<sup>10</sup> compared to costs from €30,000 in contract build housing (public & non-profit sector). Speculative development is high risk, and this means high costs.

NESC<sup>11</sup> calls this a ‘dysfunction’ and says: *“affordability should be an explicit objective.. the supply of housing is not in itself a reliable or sustainable means of making housing affordable<sup>12</sup>. Ireland must engineer affordability into the supply of housing”*.

## 3. What can be done?

**Capacity:** In 2020, the EU Commission<sup>13</sup> said that *“land price inflation alone cannot explain high house price inflation since land prices only represent between 17% and 30% of house prices. Neither can construction cost inflation, which has been relatively low in recent years...Taxes, levies and fees and finance and marketing costs have not surged. Therefore, high inflation values may be partly explained by an increase in margins, which may indicate insufficient competition”*. To address this, focus must shift to stabilizing the housing system.

The solution is not to be found in supporting inefficiencies with high subsidies<sup>14</sup>. Capacity building and competition can raise quality, lower prices and temper the boom/ bust cycle that is so damaging to employment, skills, and the wider economy.

Capacity constraints in the provision of infrastructure, water and utilities are causing delay.

Overly complex procurement, financing and approval systems are adding cost and risk.

<sup>1</sup> projected, including 10% inflation on building materials, where materials are approx. 50% of construction costs.

**Regulation:** Recent regulatory change (Planning & Building Control) have been inflationary. In late 2015, the Department of Housing policy objective was to reduce standards “aiming for [2-bedroom apartment] price points around the €200,000-€260,000 mark”. By early 2018 this had increased to be “an affordability range of between €240,000 and €320,000”, and by 2021 the benchmark for apartments in the new ‘affordable housing scheme’ in Dublin was raised to €500,000.<sup>15</sup> As the Dublin market shifted from assets valued on 25-30 years of mortgage payments to 50-60 years of high rent, prices doubled.

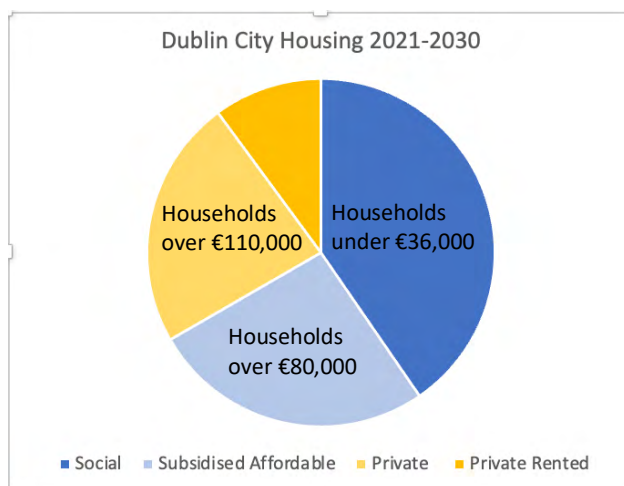
In 2018, Department of Housing stated that construction cost of a 2-bedroom apartment in Dublin could be reduced from €205,000 to €158,000 (excl VAT)<sup>16</sup>. Yet, within three years an industry report claimed that ‘the all-in cost of an urban two-bedroom apartment in Ireland is €450,000 to €615,000, including land, equity and taxation’<sup>17</sup>. These industry estimates are not substantiated or independently audited, and are not supported by independent data. Some property sector reports have made unevidenced claims of a very high cost-base,<sup>18</sup> without acknowledging that it is the high risk/ high cost speculative business model that is ‘unviable’ rather than construction cost of houses and apartments. Dublin City Council published costs for recent schemes, without highlighting that the majority are for non-standard procurement, with particular technical requirements, and on complex sites.

In urban areas, Planning changes for high density, high rise and reduced apartment standards have in general *added* to construction and finance costs; Previous standards recognized that six storeys is sustainable density and cost optimal<sup>19</sup> for residential. This scale of building is both easier to phase/ finance, and safer and more liveable for residents.

**Economic Impact** High prices are now ‘baked in’ in Dublin, as delivery is over-reliant on private investors who anticipate high returns, and are now in high risk market conditions.

Under Housing For All, no housing is planned in Dublin City for households earning over €36,000 and under €80,000 per annum. In fact, 2/3 of all new homes are to be fully publicly funded or heavily subsidized with the other 1/3 only affordable to very high earners.<sup>20</sup>

In this context, the difference to the Exchequer, between paying ‘production costs’ and ‘market prices’ in Dublin alone is in excess of €4bn (more under leasing). This has implications for the economy, competitiveness and sustainable growth.



Graph 1: Dublin City Housing for All/ HNDA (2021)

**Sustainability:** Housing policy is undermining climate and energy policies. When city housing is unaffordable and unsuited to families (new homes have shrunk 25% in 5 years<sup>21</sup>), it results in a push to the commuter belt. In 2021 for every one house built in Dublin, almost 2 were built in commuter counties, because the demand is for affordability and space. City housing for families is not a policy objective, even though half of all households have children.<sup>22</sup>

In the pursuit of 'low cost', apartment standards for space, amenity and safety (including fire standards<sup>23</sup>) have been cut. The drive for speed and light-weight construction in the short term, has not been adequately assessed against the long-term investment and need for new housing to be climate resilient, safe and sustainable for the next 100 years.

## Conclusion

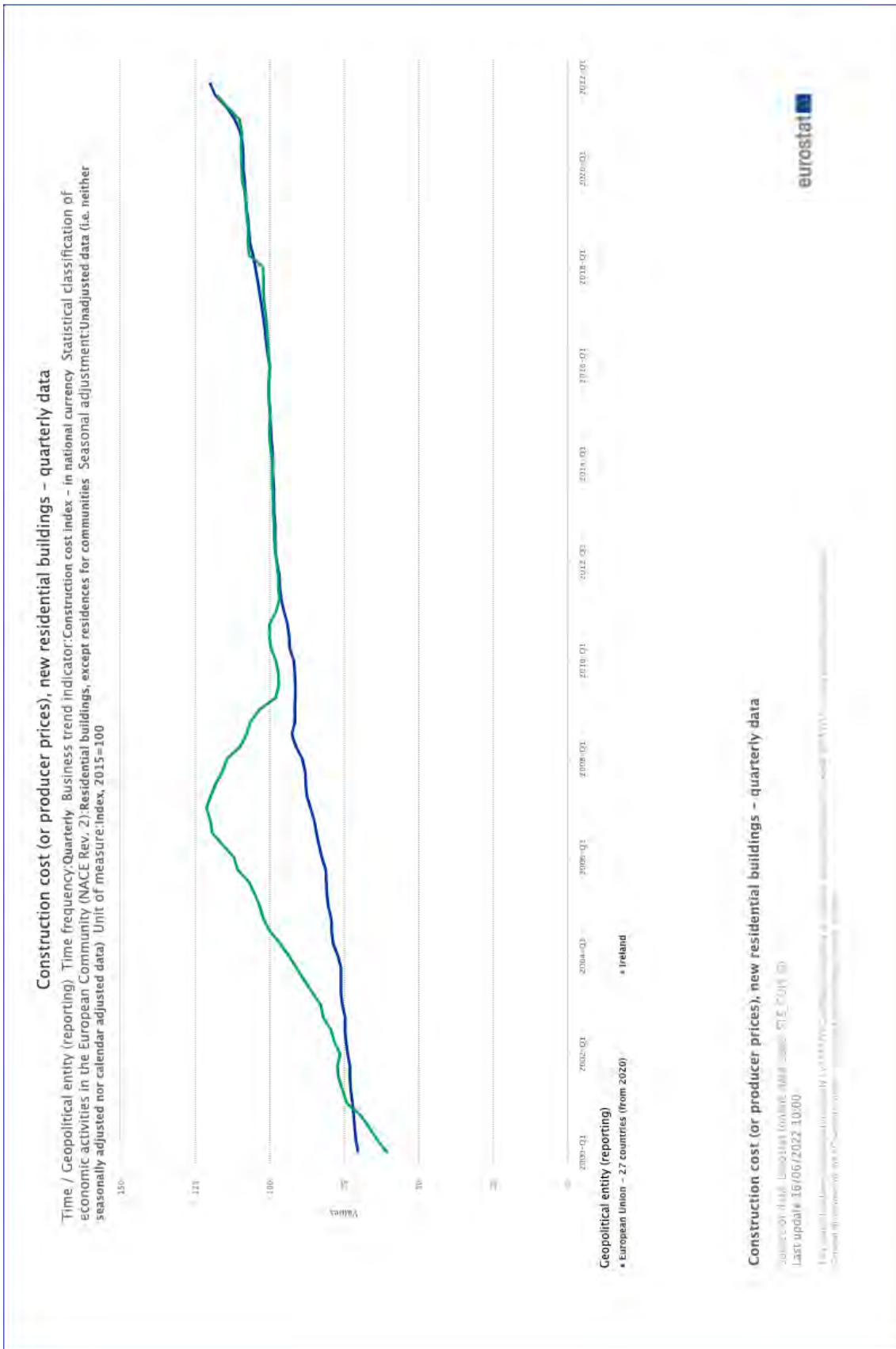
- Issues with supply chains and energy costs are outside of immediate control.
- Broader economic analysis and active risk assessment of housing policy is critically important. Policy responses of nudging viability with piece-meal interventions have been very damaging. Housing standards needs to be evidence-based, holistic, and with a long-term view. Many lobby-driven interventions are not evidence-based and have had unintended and negative consequences.
- Procurement policies and practices are adding to risk, cost, delay and the administrative burden. 'Bundling', out-sourcing and unquantifiable risk allocation are disincentives to tendering and competitive pricing. These practices also militates against capacity building, skills and more sustainable employment practices.
- The residential construction sector has not been supported to recover from the crash and has limited capacity and skills, both in design and construction.
- Pressures of skills and capacity risk substandard and non-compliant work. Quality controls need to be more independent and more robust.
- Time is of the essence: cost control should be devolved to those with expertise who are best placed to actively manage risk.

New housing has to be the right supply, in the right places and at the right price. It must be affordable to both the residents and the Exchequer. It is not sustainable or scalable to subsidise high market prices, to load new home-owners with a second mortgage, or to be so over-reliant on international speculative investment delivering to niche markets.

As IGEES says, the current housing delivery system is a 'land trap' where *sites tend to be acquired by the most optimistic with the highest expected sale prices*' and so property tends to be developed close to the '*margin of viability*'.<sup>24</sup> As sales prices rise, so land values increases. Land values don't drive sales prices, high sales prices drive up land values... and these higher values are baked into to land valuations immediately. This is the 'land value trap'. When costs increase, as now, the margin is lost, and it may be too risky to develop.

In 2016, that 'margin of viability' was around a sales price of €250,000<sup>25</sup> and now, in Dublin, it has doubled. That is not due to inflation in building materials. **/END**

Table A : EU & Ireland Construction Cost index (new residential buildings) 2000-2022



**Table B: CSO Wholesale Price Indices (excl VAT) for Building & Construction Materials**

**Table 3 Detailed Wholesale Price Indices (excluding VAT) for Building and Construction Materials**

Base: Year 2015 = 100

	Index		Monthly % Change			Annual % Change
	Apr 2022	May 2022	Mar 2022	Apr 2022	May 2022	May 2022
<b>Materials</b>						
Stone, sand and gravel	117.7	118.7	-1.8	3.7	0.8	10.6
Stone	116.3	117.3	-2.6	4.4	0.9	10.0
Sand and gravel	124.2	125.6	2.3	-0.1	1.1	13.2
Cement	144.5	144.5	0.0	6.3	0.0	14.6
Ready mixed mortar and concrete	118.4	120.5	2.3	0.3	1.8	14.4
Concrete blocks and bricks	114.2	117.2	1.7	0.2	2.6	11.4
Other concrete products	118.6	118.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.0
Precast concrete	136.6	136.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.6
Other concrete products (Excluding precast concrete)	117.2	117.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.3
Structural steel and reinforcing metal	186.0	187.4	3.0	20.5	0.8	50.5
Structural steel	178.5	178.5	1.8	27.6	0.0	40.8
Fabricated metal	174.5	174.5	0.0	31.4	0.0	38.5
Other Structural steel	210.5	210.5	13.5	6.4	0.0	58.4
Reinforcing metal	197.5	201.0	4.3	12.0	1.8	66.0
Other steel products	114.6	114.8	0.0	2.1	0.2	6.9
Rough timber (including plain sawn)	178.4	179.5	0.0	-0.8	0.6	29.3
Hardwood	126.1	126.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	17.2
Other	185.0	186.2	0.0	-0.8	0.6	30.5
Other timber	157.2	165.1	0.1	0.0	5.0	56.8
Windows and doors	123.3	123.5	0.2	0.0	0.2	14.9
Other	198.1	215.2	0.0	0.0	8.6	109.3
Bituminous macadam, asphalt and bituminous emulsions	107.8	110.3	0.0	2.1	2.3	9.6
Bituminous macadam and asphalt	107.5	110.0	-0.1	2.2	2.3	9.2
Bituminous emulsions	120.0	120.0	0.9	2.3	0.0	21.2
Electrical fittings	125.5	125.6	0.6	0.3	0.1	12.2
Lighting equipment	107.3	107.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Protection & communication equipment	107.0	107.1	-0.3	0.5	0.1	1.3
All other materials	120.9	124.0	1.2	0.8	2.6	13.2
Plumbing materials incl. sanitary ware	133.4	133.4	14.8	1.1	0.0	26.3
HVAC (heating & ventilation equipment)	110.3	112.3	0.0	0.0	1.8	1.9
Insulating materials	119.6	124.5	0.0	2.8	4.1	18.8
Pipes and fittings	126.2	127.2	1.5	0.6	0.8	10.3
PVC	147.5	149.8	5.4	2.5	1.6	20.9
Copper	119.4	119.9	0.0	0.0	0.4	6.6
Plaster	152.1	151.7	0.4	-0.3	-0.3	20.4
Paints, oils and varnishes	135.8	144.1	0.6	6.9	6.1	16.1
Glass	98.5	98.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7
All other metal fittings	116.9	116.9	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.3
All other products	115.6	120.0	0.3	0.0	3.8	13.6
<b>All materials</b>	<b>130.6</b>	<b>132.7</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>19.2</b>

Table C: Dept of Housing, Planning & Local Government, 2018

CONSTRUCTION COST COMPARISON SUMMARY

	Approximate Construction Costs		% Change in Construction Cost	Construction Cost Per Unit	% Change in Construction Cost Per Unit
	Adjustments €	Total €			
<b>Model based on 2015 Guidelines</b>		c.€51.75m	-	c.€205k/unit*	-
<b>Adjustments to reflect 2018 Guideline Revisions</b>					
1 Changes to Car Parking Requirements (reduced basement)	(c.€5.3m)		(c.10.2%)		
2 Changes to Layouts/Areas (see Note a below)	(c.€2.55m)		(c.4.9%)		
3 Where sprinklers are provided	c.€1.1m		c.2.1%		
<b>Revised Model to reflect 2018 Guideline Revisions - excl. sprinkler adjustment (1+2)</b>	<b>(c.€7.85m)</b>	<b>c.€43.9m</b>	<b>(c.15.1%)</b>	<b>c.€154k/unit**</b>	<b>(c.25%)</b>
<b>Revised Model to reflect 2018 Guideline Revisions - incl. sprinkler adjustment (1+2+3)</b>	<b>(c.€6.75m)</b>	<b>c.€45.0m</b>	<b>(c.13.0%)</b>	<b>c.€158k/unit**</b>	<b>(c.23%)</b>

\* - based on 252Nr units

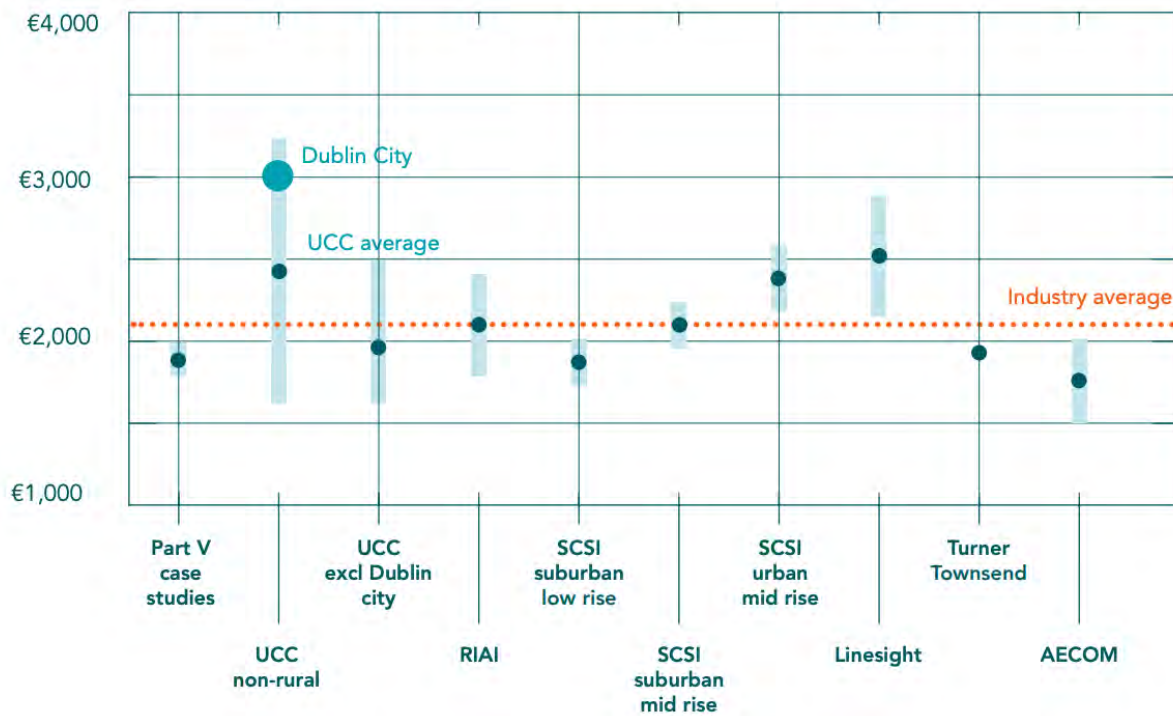
Table D: Cluid Report, 2022

Cost analysis of 3-bedroom houses constructed by private developers in Dublin region (as Part V '10% social housing')

Table 4.1 Comparative Tables, Case Study costs and Unit Cost Ceilings- 3 bedroom houses

	DHPLG Part V example €	Scheme B €	Scheme C €	Scheme E €
<b>'Hard' construction costs</b>	€140,000.00	171,979	€165,583	€147,467
Normal Construction Costs (ex. VAT & builders profit)				
<b>Profit</b> (dependent on tender climate)	€10,500.00	17,198	€16,745	€8,466
<b>Soft' development costs</b> (as applicable)			€53,687	
Professional Fees including Legal Fees	€5,000.00	18,839		€11,736
Services Connections	€3,000.00	3,338		€1,596
Development Contributions	€1,000.00	7,602		
Site Investigations	€500.00			
Planning Fees and Charges	€500.00			
Financing Charges	€5,000.00	19,090		€18,683
Other (not incl. in DHPLG example)		750		€18,399
<b>Sub-total (ex. land)</b>	<b>€165,500.00</b>	<b>238,796</b>	<b>€236,015</b>	<b>€206,347</b>
<b>Land (EUV, existing use value)</b>		<b>39,994</b>	<b>€2,235</b>	<b>€2,700</b>
<b>Sub-total (ex. VAT)</b>		278,790	€238,250	€209,047
<b>VAT (Value added tax)</b>		<b>37,579</b>	<b>€32,704</b>	<b>€28,221</b>
<b>Total (Purchase Price)</b>		<b>316,369</b>	<b>€274,954</b>	<b>€237,268</b>

**Table E: Cluid Report, 2022** Cost analysis of Dublin City Council apartment building costs



<sup>1</sup> (BNP Paribas, May 2022)  
<sup>2</sup> (Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland, 2022)  
<sup>3</sup> (Office of Government Procurement, May 2022)  
<sup>4</sup> (EuroStat, 2022)  
<sup>5</sup> (CSO, 2022)  
<sup>6</sup> (Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, 2021) |  
<sup>7</sup> (CSO, 2022)  
<sup>8</sup> (Cluid, 2022)  
<sup>9</sup> (Daft.ie/ Myhome.ie June 2022)  
<sup>10</sup> (DHPLG, 2021), (Cluid, 2022), (SCSI, 2020)  
<sup>11</sup> (NESC, 2018 & 2020)  
<sup>12</sup> (LSE, 2019)  
<sup>13</sup> (European Commission, 2020)  
<sup>14</sup> (DHPLG, 2022)  
<sup>15</sup> (Irish Times, 2021)  
<sup>16</sup> (DHPLG, 2019)  
<sup>17</sup> (IIP, 2021)  
<sup>18</sup> (SCSI, 2017), (SCSI, 2020), (Cork Chamber, 2019)  
<sup>19</sup> (DHPLG, 2018 )  
<sup>20</sup> (DHPLG, 2021)  
<sup>21</sup> (CSO, 2022).  
<sup>22</sup> (CSO, 2016)  
<sup>23</sup> (DHPLG, 2018)  
<sup>24</sup> (IGEES/ DPER, 2021) f  
<sup>25</sup> (IGEES/ DPER, 2018-), (DHPLG, 2021), (Cluid, 2022)  
 Full references available on request.

## Appendix A: Extract from Statement to Joint Oireachtas Housing Committee on Land Development Agency (Orla Hegarty 2019).

“Solutions to the supply and affordability challenge are in **design, procurement and finance**. I do not intend to comment on finance other than to say that evidently €1.25bn will not build 150,000 homes, it would build fewer than 5,000.

- Housing unlike other capital projects as it can be built incrementally; seed funding can be rolled over by phasing and strategic procurement.
- State-led master-planning and infrastructure ‘de-risks’ development, mitigates delay and reduces costs and finance for SME developers.
- ‘Un-bundling’, (prioritising small lots) for SME design teams and builders opens up new markets, raises standards, drives innovation and competition.
- Public contracts in small lots for SME builders allow them to re-capitalise, re-equip and undertake other private development, which builds capacity.
- Mass procurement of building components, standardised details and investment in research lead to efficiencies, productivity and skills.
- Define affordable housing at production cost, as Planning & Development Act 2000.

These are more resilient and recession-proofed strategies that accord with best practice in procurement, value for money and faster delivery. **These market reforms and efficiencies have the potential to deliver truly affordability housing without state subsidies or reduced quality**. The LDA proposition does not respond to this opportunity. In fact, the recent redefinition of ‘affordable’ housing as a discount or subsidy on market prices is regressive, profiting developers rather than improving access to housing for those on middle incomes or incentivising efficiency.

### Sustainability

At the rate homes are being built every new home needs to be future-proofed for 100 years. (Only 1% of housing stock is being replaced). A short term objective of “commercial” returns is wholly inappropriate to assess the long-term social, environmental and economic needs and life-cycle costs of new housing communities and infrastructure needs. A €50bn investment in housing has the potential to lever many other policy objectives, including reform of the construction sector; climate adaptation; architecture and place-making; training and skills; infrastructure, transportation and spatial planning. A “requirement to obtain a financial return for the state” is not compatible with affordability.

### Conclusion

What is important is the long-term viability of cities, not the short-term opportunity of sites; every euro of “value” extracted from public lands isn’t free- it is debt for future households; every plot given away is a lost opportunity for ‘permanent affordability’; every deal that stalls due to unforeseeable market fluctuations is a family without housing.

Ireland has the advantage of having land in public ownership, but as NESC have stated *“affordability should be an explicit objective.. supply of housing is not in itself a reliable or sustainable means of making housing affordable. Like other countries, Ireland must engineer affordability into the supply of housing”* /END

**Appendix B: “High density, low standards- the impact of deregulation on urban inclusivity and housing affordability in Ireland”**

Conference Paper, International Political Science Association (Orla Hegarty, UCD 2021)

# “High density, low standards- the impact of deregulation on urban inclusivity and housing affordability in Ireland”

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28 June 2021



## Introduction

Ireland has a housing crisis that has been declared a national emergency<sup>1</sup>. The lack of availability of suitable housing has manifested in rising purchase prices and rents, which in turn has contributed to a rise in homelessness and housing distress.

In the years 2015-2020 housing standards were changed with the objective of incentivising housing development. This included reductions in apartment quality, amenity and space standards<sup>2</sup>; the deregulation<sup>3</sup> of new housing typologies including accommodation called ‘co-living’ (bedrooms with shared facilities); and removal of height limits for new buildings.

One consequence of this deregulation is that permanent ‘homes’ now include rooms of 12m<sup>2</sup>, smaller than a standard car parking space. Additional storage space, outdoor amenity and parking are negotiable, with guidance for communal kitchen and living rooms. A housing charity has described co-living as “21st-century bedsits<sup>4</sup> with a glossy makeover”<sup>5</sup>

More broadly, minimal spaces for city workers are being seen to be prioritised over sustainable, integrated and affordable urban communities that are designed for the long term needs of the wider population, and for the 50% of households that have children.<sup>6</sup>

In a speculative market, on which the state is largely reliant for the provision of housing, policy change is the lever that incentivises development. So, in the short term, this has a disruptive effect that may be difficult to reverse. There are also economic consequences, because expectations translate into land value inflation, and this impacts on affordability.

In the longer term, there are also environmental impacts, because urban expansion is shaped by the type and location of new housing. Government policy is cognisant<sup>7</sup> that “one of the patterns from the past that needs to be avoided in the future is the long-standing tendency for the development sector, if left unmanaged, to prefer housing provision in peripheral or greenfield sites on the edges of urban areas over brownfield or re-development opportunities to a disproportionate and undesirable level.”

There is a risk that if new city housing is sub-optimal and undesirable, then the families with means will again favour the commuter belt in search of space and affordability. In turn, if new city housing is transient it militates against community; and if it is too small it risks being over-crowded. Housing policy has many social, environmental and economic costs.

This paper focuses principally on the impact of policy change in Dublin, the capital city (population 1.1 million) and home to 25% of the population<sup>8</sup>, and the Greater Dublin region, home to 40%, which includes the commuter counties of Louth, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow.

## Background & Context

The roots of the crisis are in the a speculative property and banking crisis<sup>9</sup> (from 2007), that lead to a collapse in construction which was most acute in the residential sector. The supply of new homes fell from a peak of over 93,000 (2006) to fewer than 4,600 (2013).<sup>10</sup>

In response, a five-year national housing policy was launched in 2016: 'Rebuilding Ireland'<sup>11</sup> had five pillars, one of which 'Build More Homes'<sup>12</sup> aimed for the construction of 125,000 new houses and apartments. It resulted in a series of policy and regulatory changes to incentivise the construction of new build homes. In the following years, construction output increased, although short of the targets, with 83,798 new homes being built to the end of 2020. A new national housing policy 'Housing for All' is to be launched in 2021.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) has a target for *'at least 40% of all new housing to be delivered within the existing built- up areas of cities, towns and villages on infill and/or brownfield sites'*<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the wider objective is for more sustainable and compact growth, a move away from the traditional unsustainable pattern of commuter-belt sprawl.

In the push to increase housing supply, the policy focus is to increase the number of 'units', particularly for certain demographics (students, high-earning migrant workers, first time buyers, 'down-sizers'<sup>14</sup> etc.), and in particular regions (Dublin, major regional cities and associated commuter belts). By 2021, up to 80% of new dwellings were in urban areas<sup>15</sup>, and 75% (10,385)<sup>16</sup> of all new apartments under the housing programme were in Dublin.

In broad terms, of 20,000 new dwellings in 2020, more than 1 in 3 was sold to householders; about 1 in 4 was directly-built for the owner; more than 1 in 5 was built or acquired for social housing, and about 1 in 6 was acquired by investment funds. Although the actual output of new city housing is low, in 2019 investment funds purchased or retained 95% of new apartments in Dublin city<sup>17</sup>, reversing pervious pattern of mostly owner-occupation.

In the years 2017-20 of total 16% of all new homes were built or acquired for social housing<sup>18</sup>, comprising 5,335 directly built by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHB), and 10,000 'turnkey'<sup>19</sup> purchases of newly built homes on private land. Social housing is delivered through direct and indirect mechanisms, including from the private market. This housing is only available to low income households, and subject to long waiting lists<sup>20</sup>.

An affordable housing scheme to provide housing for purchase at below market rates operated from 2000 until 2015<sup>21</sup>. A new affordable housing purchase scheme has been proposed in 2021<sup>22</sup> to be predominantly delivered through private development, with subsidies.

## Demographics

The Economic and Social Council (ESRI) estimate a national need for 26,000 -33,000 new homes annually of the basis of population level assumptions about future trends in mortality, fertility and net migration, based on assumptions of future economic activity<sup>23</sup>.

However, specific local assessment in each of thirty-one local authorities is by means of a 'Housing Strategy'<sup>24</sup>: This is a statutory process that assesses and plans for *"the existing need and the likely future need for housing; the need to ensure that housing is available for persons who have different levels of income; the need to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different*

*categories of households, as may be determined by the planning authority, and including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities; the need to counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds”*

A new methodology for local authorities to undertake a Housing Need and Demand Assessments (HNDA) was published in 2021.<sup>25</sup> In Dublin City, these are expected to be completed for incorporation in the Dublin City Development Plan (2022-28)<sup>26</sup>.

Ireland has a very young population, with one third of people under 25 years of age and one quarter under the age of 18 years. This is important in the context of housing provision, as more than 50% of all households have children (under 18 years), and more than 30% have two or more children<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, Ireland (at 7%) has more than double the EU average (3%) of homes with three or more children.<sup>28</sup>

During the five years 2011-2016 the number of working adults living at home increased by 19% (to 215,088) and this trend has been attributed to the housing crisis. In total, 458,874 adults (almost 10% of the population) were recorded as living with a parent in 2016.

Ireland is a geographically small country and 3/4 of students in higher education attend colleges within 50km of their homes of origin<sup>29</sup>. Consequently, a very high proportion of 18-24 year olds in education continue to live with their families, particularly in the cities. A National Student Accommodation Strategy (from 2015) is also part of the broader housing policy. It has the intention to remove students from the private rental market, so as to make more housing available to families. The experience to date, however, is that up 80% of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) is actually occupied by international students<sup>30</sup>.

Despite the statutory provisions to consider all housing need, it is notable that the Rebuilding Ireland Plan (2016-21) and subsequent implementation have not directly discussed the needs of families, children, young adults, multi-generational households or those with disabilities. The policy document mentions children only in the context of homelessness, which was particularly acute in 2016, as the number of children living in homelessness had tripled in the previous two years<sup>31</sup>.

## Regulatory change

Within the policy framework of the housing programme, Rebuilding Ireland (2016-21), a number of significant regulatory changes were made which impact on the system. In broad terms, certain types of housing and certain locations have been incentivised, generally favouring dense urban development of small apartments on the one hand, and commuter-belt houses (at higher densities than previously) on the other. The most substantial changes are as follows:

**2015 Urban Regeneration & Housing Act<sup>32</sup>** This legislation reduced the requirement for social housing in private developments. A ‘Part V’ requirement for social and affordable housing had been introduced in 2020, requiring up to 20% of new housing developments of more than 4 houses and apartments to be available for social and affordable housing. In 2015, this was reduced to 10% for social housing in developments of more than 9 homes.

In addition, the ‘Part V’ requirement to transfer land or homes to the local authority at a reduced purchase price was amended to include long-term leasing arrangements, and this is typically for 10 or more years.

The effect of this has been that many developers now favour leasing to local authorities. Concerns have been expressed at the high cost of these leases<sup>33</sup>, and the future political and social impact of displacing communities of social tenants at the end of the leases.

**2015 Planning & Development (Amendment) Act<sup>34</sup>** In late 2015, a provision was introduced to allow the Minister to issue mandatory guidelines that are binding on Planning authorities and An Bord Pleannala<sup>35</sup> (the Planning appeals board). Under these 'Section 28' guidelines, Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) *'take precedence over any conflicting, policies and objectives of development plans, local area plans and strategic development zone planning schemes'*<sup>36</sup>. These new powers have been the mechanism to impose a series of regulatory changes, by-passing standards adopted by local authorities following research and consultation.

**2015 Section 28- Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments** New space standards (floor area, room sizes, private open space, storage, etc) were set for apartments on a national basis; these guidelines updated 2007 minimum standards, but in Dublin City (where most apartments are built) this had the effect of reducing standards set by the local authority in 2009. As an example, the 2-bedroom apartment size in Dublin City Council was reduced from 85m<sup>2</sup> to 80m<sup>2</sup>, and ceiling heights on upper floors were lowered from 2.7m to 2.4m. Changes were also introduced to minimum requirements for lifts/ stairs<sup>37</sup>, dual-aspect apartments, outdoor amenity areas and storage. Studio (one room apartments) of minimum size 40m<sup>2</sup>, were also permitted, and they could be up to 50% of apartments in certain developments. Homes of this size had not previously been permitted in Dublin City, where the minimum had been 55m<sup>2</sup> for a one-bedroom apartment'.

In summary, DCC adopted minimum standards in 2011, which considerably exceed national planning policy advice, which do not appear to be evidentially based and are not particularly discerning - they fail for instance to distinguish between the appropriate space standards for a 3 person or a 4 person apartment.

DCC has also introduced particular restrictions and requirements, in particular the requirement for almost universal dual aspect units, without realising the particular impact.

**Essentially DCC are enforcing very prescriptive standards, without any indication that they will in any way better foster sustainable communities and in fact, by effectively limiting apartment development to high cost units, are discouraging a sustainable balanced community.**

The Decline of Apartment Development in Dublin: Key Issues, 2015  
(Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government)

**2018 Section 28 - Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments<sup>38</sup>**

Further amendments were made to apartment guidelines, most significantly the introduction of lower standards for 'build-to-rent' (BTR) apartments, and a new typology of 'co-living' (shared accommodation). For the first time different standards were set for apartment residents on the basis of tenure (i.e. different for owner occupiers and renters).

A 'studio' (single room) home was further reduced to 37m<sup>2</sup>. The BTR standards do not have a requirement for private outdoor space such as terraces and balconies, or car parking. Importantly, the mandatory 'mix' of apartment sizes (as determined by local authorities for local need) was removed, meaning developments could be all smaller apartments.

# MINIMUM APARTMENT STANDARDS 1995- 2015

Comparison of DECLG minimum apartment standards from 1995, 2007, 2009 (DCC) and 2015 Minimum Standard Apartments (floor area compliant: 100+ scheme)

TYPE	1995	2007	2009	2015
<b>3 Bedroom Apartment</b>	<p><b>1995</b> 70 SQM 3 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 12.0                      Kitchen: 6.0                      Dining Room: 6.0                      Living Area: 34.0                      Total floor area: 58.0                      Total area covered: 70.0</p>	<p><b>2007</b> 85 SQM 3 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 13.0                      Kitchen: 6.0                      Dining Room: 6.0                      Living Area: 36.0                      Total floor area: 55.0                      Total area covered: 85.0</p>	<p><b>2009 (DCC compliant)</b> 100 SQM 3 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 15.0                      Kitchen: 6.0                      Dining Room: 6.0                      Living Area: 39.0                      Total floor area: 66.0                      Total area covered: 100.0</p>	<p><b>2015</b> 80 SQM 3 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 12.0                      Kitchen: 6.0                      Dining Room: 6.0                      Living Area: 36.0                      Total floor area: 54.0                      Total area covered: 80.0</p>
<b>2 Bedroom Apartment</b>	<p><b>1995</b> 55 SQM 2 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 12.0                      Kitchen: 6.0                      Living Area: 33.0                      Total floor area: 51.0                      Total area covered: 55.0</p>	<p><b>2007</b> 80 SQM 2 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 13.0                      Kitchen: 6.0                      Living Area: 35.0                      Total floor area: 54.0                      Total area covered: 80.0</p>	<p><b>2009 (DCC compliant)</b> 85 SQM 2 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 14.0                      Kitchen: 6.0                      Living Area: 37.0                      Total floor area: 57.0                      Total area covered: 85.0</p>	<p><b>2015</b> 73 SQM 2 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 12.0                      Kitchen: 6.0                      Living Area: 35.0                      Total floor area: 53.0                      Total area covered: 73.0</p>
<b>1 Bedroom Apartment</b>	<p><b>1995</b> 38 SQM 1 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 10.0                      Kitchen: 5.0                      Living Area: 23.0                      Total floor area: 38.0                      Total area covered: 38.0</p>	<p><b>2007</b> 50 SQM 1 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 11.0                      Kitchen: 5.0                      Living Area: 24.0                      Total floor area: 40.0                      Total area covered: 50.0</p>	<p><b>2009 (DCC compliant)</b> DCC 35 SQM 1 BED SINGLE-ASPECT APARTMENT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 10.0                      Kitchen: 5.0                      Living Area: 20.0                      Total floor area: 35.0                      Total area covered: 35.0</p>	<p><b>2015</b> 40 SQM STUDIO (BEDD) SINGLE-ASPECT UNIT</p> <p>ACCUMULATED OVERSTRESS (H2)                      Living Room/Study: 10.0                      Kitchen: 5.0                      Living Area: 25.0                      Total floor area: 40.0                      Total area covered: 40.0</p>

Comparative analysis of minimum apartment standards, (Maoiliosa Reynolds Architect, 2016)

“High density, low standards- the impact of deregulation on urban inclusivity and housing affordability in Ireland”

Co-Living ('shared accommodation') reduced minimum standards to 12m<sup>2</sup> private space, with shared kitchen and living areas of 4-8m<sup>2</sup>/ person. This typology, similar to student housing, does not have requirements for car parking, outdoor amenity or facilities for children, and has limited provision of facilities for people with disabilities.

**Specific Planning Policy Requirement 8**

For proposals that qualify as specific BTR development in accordance with SPPR 7:

- (i) No restrictions on dwelling mix and all other requirements of these Guidelines shall apply, unless specified otherwise;
- (ii) Flexibility shall apply in relation to the provision of a proportion of the storage and private amenity space associated with individual units as set out in Appendix 1 and in relation to the provision of all of the communal amenity space as set out in Appendix 1, on the basis of the provision of alternative, compensatory communal support facilities and amenities within the development. This shall be at the discretion of the planning authority. In all cases the obligation will be on the project proposer to demonstrate the overall quality of the facilities provided and that residents will enjoy an enhanced overall standard of amenity;
- (iii) There shall be a default of minimal or significantly reduced car parking provision on the basis of BTR development being more suitable for central locations and/or proximity to public transport services. The requirement for a BTR scheme to have a strong central management regime is intended to contribute to the capacity to establish and operate shared mobility measures;
- (iv) The requirement that the majority of all apartments in a proposed scheme exceed the minimum floor area standards by a minimum of 10% shall not apply to BTR schemes;
- (v) The requirement for a maximum of 12 apartments per floor per core shall not apply to BTR schemes, subject to overall design quality and compliance with building regulations.

Build-to-Rent apartment standards, 2018

**2019 Section 28 Height Guidelines**<sup>39</sup> Under mandatory guidelines, building heights were also de-regulated. Previously, building height limits were set by local authorities and in Dublin this was generally 16-28 metres; this allowed up to nine storeys for residential buildings in most of the city with five storeys permitted in more sensitive and historic areas, in recognition that *'the intrinsic quality of Dublin as a low-rise city and considers that it should remain predominantly so. The vast majority of the city area is identified as not being suitable for mid-rise or taller buildings'*<sup>40</sup>. Although de-regulation had been claimed to be to address the housing supply and affordability crisis, the removal of the height caps applied to all buildings including offices and hotels.

***In accordance with Government policy to support increased building height and density in locations with good public transport accessibility, particularly town/ city cores, planning authorities shall explicitly identify, through their statutory plans, areas where increased building height will be actively pursued for both redevelopment, regeneration and infill development to secure the objectives of the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and shall not provide for blanket numerical limitations on building height.***

Urban Developments & Buildings Heights: Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2018

**2017 Strategic Housing Development (SHD)** A further change moved the decision-making process for larger residential Planning applications (100 or more homes, or 200 or more student rooms<sup>41</sup>) and from the local authority to An Bord Pleanála (the Planning appeals board). Although stated to be on the basis of ‘fast tracking’ permission for housing, this had the effect of significantly reducing public participation, and moving the process outside the framework of democratically adopted local authority Development Plans. The SHD process was time-limited to the end of 2020, but has been extended to early 2022<sup>42</sup>. This has been very controversial, with concerns about the origins of the policy<sup>43</sup>, and an escalation of cases being referred to judicial review, with many overturned<sup>44</sup>.

### ‘Co-living’

Co-living (‘shared accommodation’) is a new form of rental accommodation introduced in 2018 for “*a specific renter cohort with specific needs or requirements from their housing provision. In particular, the usefulness of such an accommodation type to the dynamics in the urban employment market*”.

**Specific Planning Policy Requirement 9**  
**Shared Accommodation may be provided and shall be subject to the requirements of SPPRs 7 (as per BTR). In addition,**

- (i) **No restrictions on dwelling mix shall apply;**
- (ii) **The overall unit, floor area and bedroom floorspace requirements of Appendix 1 of these Guidelines shall not apply and are replaced by Tables 5a and 5b;**
- (iii) **Flexibility shall be applied in relation to the provision of all storage and amenity space as set out in Appendix 1, on the basis of the provision of alternative, compensatory communal support facilities and amenities. The obligation will be on the project proposer to demonstrate the overall quality of the facilities provided and that residents will enjoy an enhanced overall standard of amenity;**
- (iv) **A default policy of minimal car parking provision shall apply on the basis of shared accommodation development being more suitable for central locations and/or proximity to public transport services. The requirement for shared accommodation to have a strong central management regime is intended to contribute to the capacity to establish and operate shared mobility measures;**

Co-living (shared accommodation) standards, 2018

Whereas previously, housing was regulated for self-contained homes, these standards allow permanent rental housing to have shared facilities such as communal kitchens, laundry rooms and social areas. The rental arrangements are intended to include utilities, insurances and service charges for building cleaning, security, management and maintenance. In many ways they follow the typology of student accommodation (PBSA) or an apart-hotel, but for the purpose of long term, permanent housing.

Co-living is not required to have private or shared outdoor amenity space or a car parking provision. It is also not subject to the general requirement that a percentage of housing be reserved for social housing<sup>45</sup>. In some cases, shared kitchens have been proposed for more than 40 people.

During the pandemic, temporary permission has been granted to some student accommodation to change to this use, meaning it is not subject the usual restriction of 9-months student accommodation and 3-months tourist accommodation. One senator said this was a “*dangerous precedent for co-living by the back door.*”<sup>46</sup> As ‘co-living’ has been designated as residential rather than hotel, it is permitted in residential zoning, where hotels would not generally be permitted due to impact on adjoining residents.

Whereas, students in purpose-built accommodation usually stay for defined terms (generally 12-15 weeks), co-living is not limited in duration and is a much broader demographic, without natural defined limits of academic terms. There has been some concern over rights of residents, as it was suggested that they may be given a licence agreement (as a hotel). Tenancy agreements, on the other hand, are regulated<sup>47</sup> and subject to controls such as rent increases in certain areas ('Rent Pressure Zones').

<b>Shared Accommodation – minimum bedroom size</b>	
Single* 12 m2	Double/twin* 18 m2 *Including ensuite (bathroom)
Shared Accommodation – minimum common living and kitchen facilities floor area	
Bedrooms 1-3 8m2 per person	Bedrooms 4-6 additional 4m2 per person

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, 2020 Update

The private space in this shared housing is very limited, and the 2018 guidelines permit rooms of 12m2, although more typically 16m2 has been proposed by developers. This has been controversial, labelled as 'shoe box living' and 'homes smaller than parking spaces', with concerns about the privacy and safety of residents living in close proximity, and of over-concentrations of one demographic of resident.

Concerns about building management, security, over-crowding and public health (amplified by the pandemic) have been raised. Living in close proximity to many others is evidenced to impact on mental health and well-being. In response to public concerns, some controls we introduced in 2020 following a review.<sup>48</sup> However, this is effectively a restriction rather than a ban<sup>49</sup>.

## CASE STUDY - O'Devaney Gardens, Dublin

O'Devaney Gardens is a development site in north Dublin city. It was formerly a social housing project built in the mid-1950s<sup>50</sup> for 272 families, comprising thirteen buildings of four storey housing, now demolished<sup>51</sup>. The site extends to 5.06 hectares and is in an area of low-rise, traditional inner suburban housing. The lands have been vacant since 2008, when an earlier development arrangement for a public-private partnership (PPP) collapsed.

In 2019 the site was transferred to a private developer for a scheme of private, social and affordable homes. It is controversial, primarily because of the method of procurement arrangements and the cost of the future homes. The proposals have had a number of iterations, each increasing the density and building height. In 2015, it was proposed to build 480 homes on the site<sup>52</sup>, then 768 (2019), and most recently 1,047 (2021).

The current proposal is for 10 apartment blocks, one of 14 storeys in height and two others of 12 storeys, which could accommodate up to 3,700 residents at a density of over 734 persons/ hectare (based on full occupancy of bedrooms). This is more than three times the density of population in the original housing on the site, which had 1,116 residents (220 persons/ hectare).

	<b>Studio (1 px)</b>	<b>1-bedroom (2 px)</b>	<b>2-bedroom (4 px)</b>	<b>3-bedroom (5 px)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1954 social housing</b>	1 (1 px)	56 (112 px)	72 (288 px)	143 (715 px)	272 homes (1,116 px)
<i>% 'mix'</i>	<i>0.4%</i>	<i>21%</i>	<i>26%</i>	<i>53%</i>	<i>100%</i>
<b>2021 proposal<sup>53</sup></b>	0 (0 px)	318 (636 px)	567 (2,268 px)	162 (810 px)	1,047 (3,714 px)

% 'mix'	0%	30%	54%	16%	100%
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Comparison of housing 'mix', O'Devaney Gardens, Dublin

More than half of the original housing had three bedrooms, which is more suitable and flexible for different family demographics, disability, caring, and multi-generational households. The current proposal is for 16% of three-bedroom homes, with 84% of the apartments to be one- and two- bedroom apartments. Studios and co-living are not included, by agreement.

The most recent proposal is understood to include 258 units for social housing apartments (25%), which is fewer units than was available previously on the site, although a further 56 houses have recently been built on an adjoining site.

The cost of homes in the new development has been controversial. It has been proposed that the average market price of private homes will be €450,000, with subsidised 'affordable homes' available at a purchase price of €360,000- 420,000<sup>54</sup>. The future costs of social rental and affordable rental housing in this development are not yet known.

As a consequence of the high-density and tall building on the site, it has now been reported that up to 400 of these apartments may not have adequate daylight, due to densification and over-shadowing<sup>55</sup>. Planning Permission is currently being sought for development on the site through the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process, for larger housing projects over 100 units.

If the proposed homes in this quality development were available on the market now we consider (As agreed by our Professional Valuers) that they would be fetching in the region of 450,000 Euro (Average). A discount of 20% is being applied by the Developer, this together with the application of the Government's Serviced Site Fund (50k per unit) and the waiver of Development Levies (10k per unit) brings the ultimate purchase price for the successful affordable housing applicant to **300,000 Euro** (average). Purchasers may also be entitled to the Government's Help To Buy Scheme of up to 20,000 Euro. There will of course be a Clawback process put in place in order to ultimately retrieve the discount/subsidy availed of.

Report on Housing Land Initiative-O'Devaney Gardens, Dublin City Council 2019

### Impact of Regulatory Changes

The overall impact of these incremental changes has been significant. In broad terms, the trends are towards a reduction in housing quality and an increase in housing cost, as densification and de-regulation (among other factors) have fuelled speculation<sup>56</sup>. In turn BTR and co-living have 'out-competed' traditional residential development, including apartments for purchase.

**Space and housing 'mix'**: Space standards in housing in Ireland are amongst the lowest in Europe<sup>57</sup> and in fact the average new dwellings size index (nationally, houses and apartments) shows a reduction of 34% between 2011 and 2021<sup>58</sup>. More recently (since 2012), data for homes in Europe is measured on the basis of number of rooms, rather than floor area<sup>59</sup>. By this metric, Ireland has low rates of 'over-crowding' but this may be inadequate to ascertain the broader (and more important) issue of adequate space.

As the patterns of existing housing and demographics vary, so too are future local needs very spatially specific: For example, research confirms that in parts of inner city Dublin more than 50% of homes have two rooms or less<sup>60</sup>, so in this location there is a need for larger apartments in established communities, to redress the balance and provide for continuity. A "neighbourhood balance" is needed to accommodate the needs of growing families<sup>61</sup>.

Conversely, in some other suburban areas there are insufficient homes for smaller or ‘down-sizing’ households, and a greater mix of different sizes and configurations are needed. Regulated housing ‘mix’ is a means to ensure choice in mixed communities, which mitigates overcrowding and transience.

The policy context, however, is that the type and location of new development is largely controlled by private developers, regardless of national targets, local needs or market conditions. In advance of local needs assessments (HNDA), there has been a strong focus on national supply targets and numbers of ‘units’ without a wider discussion of the type, size, location and affordability of new housing.

A strong narrative for smaller homes, rather than family homes has been adopted including ‘the need for more 1 and 2 bedroom units in line with wider demographic and household formation trends’, with an assumption that minimum standards are adequate to all housing need. The relatively recent concept of ‘under-occupancy’, such as the United Kingdom policy to re-distribute social housing by means of a tax on un-occupied bedrooms<sup>62</sup> has been put forward as a reason to prioritise smaller apartments, rather than larger family homes.

In urban areas, the removal of the requirement for a ‘mix’ of apartment sizes, and the introduction of ‘studio’ (one room) and ‘co-living’ (shared accommodation) are therefore now being favoured, as they have higher returns on investment.

Since this has been de-regulated there is a strong trend towards smaller apartments.

<b>Estimate of distribution of Dwelling Size per bedroom required to meet projected demand</b>					
Number of bedrooms per dwelling unit	1-bed 55m <sup>2</sup>	2-bed 80m <sup>2</sup>	3-bed	4-bed	5-bed
Estimate of distribution of dwelling size per bedroom	20%	40%	30%	10%	5%

Estimate of the Distribution of Dwelling Size per Bedroom Required to Meet Projected Demand (Dublin City Council Development Plan, 2016-22)<sup>63</sup>

Number of bedrooms per dwelling	Co-living	Studio	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed
Estimate of distribution of dwelling size per bedroom	33%	5%	40%	15%	7%

Proposed mix of apartment sizes on one Dublin development, 2021<sup>64</sup>

**Infrastructure and amenity:** The reduction in mandatory requirements for larger apartments means that supporting infrastructure for family homes can also now be ‘designed-out’ in many developments, particularly the provision of child-care facilities and outdoor play areas. Under Planning regulations, new housing developments are required to provide childcare facilities (creches) as pre-school and after-school services for children on the basis of ‘one childcare facility per seventy-five dwellings is recommended (and a pro-rata increase for developments in excess of seventy-five houses)<sup>65</sup>. However, as developments of smaller apartments are now permitted there is an exemption as ‘one-bedroom or studio type units should not generally be considered to contribute to a requirement for any childcare provision and subject to location, this may also apply in part or whole, to units with two or more bedrooms<sup>66</sup>.

**Health, safety and well-being:** These new standards allow apartment buildings with longer corridors, fewer lift/stair cores, and without private outdoor space (such as balconies, terraces or gardens) in build-to-rent developments. Such changes impact on the quality of life and

safety of residents. Moreover, they are features that are not possible to remedy over the lifecycle of the building. In parallel, fire safety regulations<sup>67</sup> were changed to allow the removal of internal fire lobbies and to extend the minimum distance from apartments to escape stairs. This, together with the removal of height limits, has raised concerns about the safety of upper storeys in tall buildings, where risk is greater and ladder rescue not possible.

Furthermore, the reduction in dual-aspect apartments (i.e. windows on more than one side) means reduced daylight and sunlight and the absence of a facility for cross-ventilation. This has implications for public health (disease control), as well as the comfort, mental health and well-being of residents. For example, reductions in floor area and ceiling height for a 2-bedroom BTR apartment in Dublin City result in an internal volume of air that is almost 20% less than previously, making apartments more difficult to adequately ventilate<sup>68</sup>.

If ways are not found to match delivery costs to the spending power of consumers, two key things will happen (and there is clear evidence to say that this is already the case) (i) public housing lists and demand for emergency accommodation will continue to rise markedly with all of the social consequences that brings and (ii) people will leave the city and opt for cheaper housing solutions in surrounding areas with the transport and competitiveness implications that such a trend would create.

Technical Analysis of national apartment standards (2007) and Dublin City Council standards (2011) by Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, 2015

Economic circumstances around residential construction today are much more challenging from those pertaining at the time the previous guidelines were prepared. New mortgage lending rules, amongst other factors, are exerting strong downward pressure on prices. The planning process, along with other sources of input costs, must play its full part in ensuring that while appropriate standards of accommodation and services are set from a long term planning and sustainable development perspective, that such standards are also economically viable in terms of the return on residential construction needed to enable supply in the first place, given what people can afford in terms of rents and/or mortgages.

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments  
Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, 2015

**Cost and affordability:** In late 2015, the policy objective was to reduce standards “*aiming for [2-bedroom apartment] price points around the €200,000-€260,000 mark*”. By early 2018 this had increased to be “*geared towards an outline affordability range of between €240,000 and €320,000*”, and by 2021 the benchmark for apartments in the new ‘affordable housing scheme’ in Dublin was raised to €500,000<sup>69</sup>.

Affordability, in particular, has become a critical issue in cities with the median purchase price of new homes increasing by 22% in Dublin, and by 51% in Dublin City in three years (2018-21)<sup>70</sup>. Similarly rents have been increasing, and the ‘standardised rent’ in Dublin is now €1,745/month, up 14% from €1,527 (2018-21).

The re-regulation of taller buildings is unlikely to improved affordability, due in part to the increased cost of construction; in 2018, Department of Housing research confirmed that six storeys was cost-optimal for apartment development, taking account the increased cost of building higher. Since this deregulation, permission has been sought (and in many cases granted) for buildings considerably taller than the previous limits. In one instance, a building permitted for 25 floors of build-to-rent apartments is now proposed to be developed as an office building, as it is 'not viable' for housing development<sup>71</sup>.

Given the gap between Irish and European averages in numbers of households living in apartments and as we grapple with the challenges of meeting the housing needs of a growing population in our key cities and towns and by building inwards and upwards rather than outwards, apartments need to become more and more the norm for urban housing solutions. This need will continue because of on-going population growth, particularly in Ireland's cities, a long-term move towards smaller average household size, an ageing and more diverse population, with greater mobility, and a higher proportion of households in the rented sector. Between 2011 and 2016, the rate of formation of households in apartments was more than four times that of all other types of housing combined.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the economics of residential multi-unit and apartment construction remain challenging. The planning process, along with other sources of regulation and related input cost, must play its full part in ensuring that, while appropriate standards of accommodation are set from a long-term planning and sustainable development perspective, that such standards are compatible with economically viable housing supply in our major urban areas, based on people's incomes and what they can afford in terms of rents and/or mortgages.

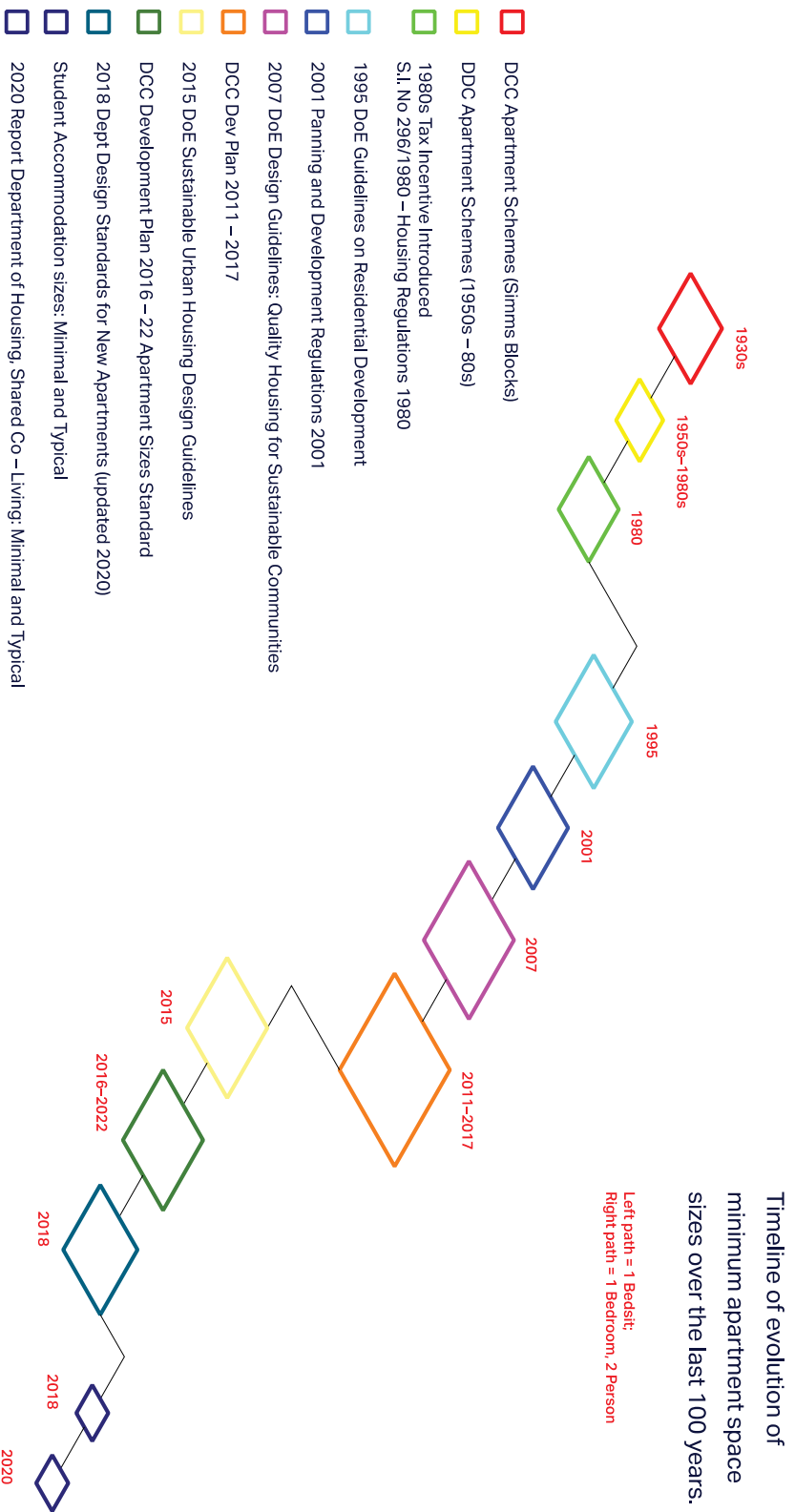
These Guidelines have been prepared, taking account of up-to-date evidence of projected future housing demand, the overall policy context of *Rebuilding Ireland* and the draft *National Planning Framework*, as well as circumstances prevailing in the housing market.

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments  
Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, 2018

The primary justification for reducing standards was a claims that it would make housing less expensive to build, and that this in turn would make new housing more affordable. There is no evidence that this is the case, and in fact the removal of height caps has increased the development risk, construction costs and future running costs, as larger developments are more difficult to finance, construct, maintain and operate.

More generally, there has been very little evidence supporting these policy changes and many significant moves have not been adequately interrogated or assessed for health, social, environmental and economic impacts. These regulatory changes have not been subject to a formal Regulatory Impact Assessment.

# EVOLUTION OF SPACE



## CONCLUSION

Artist Corban Walker in his recent art installation (above), draws attention to the evolution of minimum space in Dublin housing over the last 100 years<sup>72</sup>, and warns of *'living in a very unforgiving space'*, that *'will not build or cultivate a community, [and] can only create a condition of isolation that could mirror our very recent struggle of coping under a lengthy pandemic lockdown'*.

He alludes to the fact that housing must meet the needs of humans and of society. This is a more complex task than constructing property, as housing impacts on the health, well-being, safety and security of residents over the lifetime (likely 50-100 years) of a building. So, the suitability of housing has potential to either support or to undermine the occupants, their community and broader society.

Regulation is the mechanism that ensures housing is appropriate to the needs and resources of the everyone in a community, in the long term. Similarly, urban Planning ensures the sustainable and strategic placement of new housing and its infrastructure. A robust decision-making process is needed to balance these policy pressures and risks. Spatial development controls, therefore, are a mechanism of allocating resources, as land, finance, materials and labour are limited.

In addition, settled standards are a means of creating stability in the system and in the market to mitigate land speculation, temper cost inflation, and encourage more prompt development. De-regulation tends to lead to repeat Planning applications, rather than prompt development. Only 700 (of 43,000 permitted) houses and apartments under the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) Planning process, were built in the first three years<sup>73</sup>.

In this context, housing supply can be difficult to control when it is substantially reliant on speculative property developers, as the demands of the market are not the same as the needs of the community. This can lead to pressure to lower standards in order to increase returns on property investment or reach 'viability' (the point where the returns are sufficient to commit to development). In turn, this means that minimum standards tend to become the norm, and that housing typologies with the highest returns are prioritised. The result is also that housing supply is very vulnerable to changing economic and market conditions.

In five years of policy change, the government target price for a new Dublin apartment went from €260,000<sup>74</sup> (fully funded by the purchaser), to €500,000 (supported up to 1/3 with public subsidy and/or shared equity). The median market price for a new build home in Dublin City reached €675,000 in 2020, an increase of more than 50% in three years. As prices have risen, so fewer people have been able to meet their own housing needs and there is more pressure on the state to subsidise or support access to housing.

The cost of housing is also impacting on Ireland's competitiveness; the European Commission has raised concerns about affordability and (allowing for construction and land inflation), questions whether *'high inflation values may be partly explained by an increase in margins, which may indicate insufficient competition'*<sup>75</sup>. So, although the housing crisis is often presented as a supply crisis, there are underlying capacity constraints which are a consequence of the previous crisis. The market has high barriers to entry, which results in structural barriers to delivering supply and improving affordability.

As housing supply targets are very heavily reliant on private investment, there is pressure on government to ensure that the market is attractive to investors, with good returns in the form of high rents and sales prices. Supply has now become conditional on high prices.

Balancing these two competing pressures -more supply and less cost- is the driver of reduced standards, increased density, deregulation, and increasingly public subsidy. Short-term development 'viability', rather than long-term sustainability has become the determinant of housing standards. In fact, the stated policy aim is for apartment standards that are *"compatible with economically viable housing supply in our major urban areas, based on people's incomes and what they can afford in terms of rents and/or mortgages"*<sup>76</sup>.

It is evident that the impact of deregulation will not be even, as low standards and high prices are felt most by those who are already marginalised. Inadequate space and amenity lead to poor health, over-crowding and transient communities; high housing costs result in more people living in inadequate and unsuitable conditions; a lack of choice causes people to move further away or compromise their needs for space, amenity and affordability.

Architect and author Michael Sorkin speaks of the new iteration of micro-housing that reverses more than a century's effort to eliminate overcrowding and expand quality... *'the idea that there is a class of renter tenant who must ever trim their spaces to their demographic status is truly invidious, a return to.. Existenzminimum*<sup>77</sup>, *a designated minimum spatial entitlement that government is to regulate and facilitate'*. He says that *'..an aspirational minimum -a chicken in every pot- is one thing; an on-going process of defining that minimum down- betrays a lack of both imagination and compassion'*<sup>78</sup>.

/END

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## **Appendix 2**

***Planning Design Standards for Apartments,  
Guidelines for Planning Authorities  
(PDSA) 2025***

***a Technical Assessment***

***Environmental & Climatic Impacts  
with a focus on  
Overheating and Daylighting***

***Affidavit of  
John Morehead FRIAI Architect Cork***

Project No.: 11446 – J.Morehead FRIAI – 14<sup>h</sup> October 2025

Title: Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025

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**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This technical assessment considers the certain environmental and climate implications of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2025) Planning Design Standards for Apartments: Guidelines for Planning Authorities [PDSA,2025] and the Strategic Planning Policy Requirements [SPPR's] therein.

The intent of the 2025 guidelines was to reduce costs and therefore stimulate the supply of dwelling units to address the deficit in housing provision in Ireland.

This report considers what environmental impacts and climate implications the SPPR's would have on a particular unit type in either Cork or Dublin, with a focus on the interaction between overheating, daylighting and energy performance. These key indicators are assessed using various international standards and methodologies but do so with significantly different climate data sources and levels of complexity.

Achieving acceptable levels of comfort and building performance requires a unique balance of solar gains and thermal envelope, thermal mass, air quality and daylighting. Although this balance must be cost effective, the reduction of unit sizes to meet a cost driven criterion without validation should be avoided. Any rectification measures may require energy and carbon intensive interventions to resolve these conflicted design parameters, generating unforeseen Global Warming Potential (GWP).

John Morehead FRIAI Cork

14<sup>th</sup> October 2025

## 2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Designers now have a design dilemma: How to deliver a studio format that can achieve the 2025 SPPR requirements, but avoid significant overheating, and yet achieve acceptable daylighting, overall energy performance and comfort?

2.2 For the purposes of our assessment, we have generated 2 studio unit models: the Land Development Agency (LDA) 2023 1-Person Studio (1A, 38m<sup>2</sup>) and a 32m<sup>2</sup> studio unit to reflect the PDSA, 2025 proposed area limit.

2.3 In the ground floor models, ceiling heights were set to 2.7m, with windows set to 2.4m head height to draw more light into lower level. The upper floor units are assumed to have a 2.4m ceiling height (minimum permitted in PDSA 2025) and 2.1m head height for windows.

2.4 Overheating in Low Energy and Near Zero Energy Buildings (nZEB) buildings has been referred to as a perfect storm shown in the recent overheating analysis of nZEB homes (Colclough and Salaris, 2024) and changes in 2019 to Part L of the Irish Building Regulations included a requirement to assess the level of overheating initially using DEAP and if predicted to have overheating, an assessment in accordance with CIBSE TM59.

2.5 In a temperate climate such as that enjoyed in Ireland, the risk of overheating for dwellings with an East or West facing aspect is increased and can manifest itself well outside the summer months. The occupation profile used in CIBSE TM59 for an overheating assessment for a bedroom is 11pm-7am, where early morning sun can be a significant source of overheating from 5am in April or October.

2.6 The guidance in Section 3.8 of the PDSA 2025 (Private Amenity Space) states that no less than 50% of units should be provided with Private Amenity Space (4m<sup>2</sup> for Studios in Appendix 1), whereas in 2023 all units were to be provided with a private amenity space. Private amenity space is generally provided by way of balconies, which not only add amenity value and access to external space, they also provide significant shading to units below to reduce solar gain. The impact of the omission of this shading is demonstrated in the increased overheating potential in both variants of the 2nd floor Studios in the appendix.

2.7 Achieving acceptable levels of comfort and building performance requires a unique balance of solar gains and thermal envelope, thermal mass, air quality and daylighting to ensure that satisfactory levels of comfort can be achieved. In my study, only 2 out of 24 units at 32m<sup>2</sup> area meet all 3 criteria, namely TM59(2017) Criteria A, Criteria B and Daylighting. The reduction of unit sizes to meet a cost-driven criteria without validation has a significant Environmental and Climate impact necessitating dedicated cooling provision.

2.8 In considering the impact of the SPPRs, I have focused on the smallest unit referred to in the PDSA 2025, a 1-person Studio, as I expect it will gain favour where unit delivery is a key performance indicator. This expectation is supported by unit mix relaxation, unit size reduction, increased single aspect potential and ceiling height reduction. I am particularly interested in how the individual SPPRs may impact upon Indoor Environmental Quality.

2.9 The reduction in unit area will not necessarily reduce plug loads, Domestic Hot Water, cooking or clothes washing loads. Thermal bridges at windows etc will be more significant proportionally in external envelope losses.

2.10 The Primary energy kWh/m<sup>2</sup> value will increase and the Building Energy Rating if accurately assessed, will also increase. Global Warming Potential measured to meet the EPBD and Delegated Regulation Act 2025 will change how BER ratings are achieved. The use of renewables to offset excessive energy demand will no longer be in favour as the real carbon cost of poor envelope design and performance is monetised

2.11 The National methodology (DEAP) determining the Building Energy Rating of any dwelling throughout Ireland, calculates the energy value based on a Dublin Airport climate dataset with an allowance for internal heat gains for a dwelling based on an area, rather than on a per person basis. Internal heat gains will therefore be underestimated on smaller apartments and overestimated on larger units.

2.12 In CIBSE TM 59, internal heat loads are calculated per person, and climate is location specific. In financial assessments, costs should be project specific and any metrics based on actual costs/m<sup>2</sup> or on a cost of unit per person. Construction costs should be all inclusive project costs taking account of all items necessary to deliver construction projects compliant with all applicable regulatory standards.

2.13 Although TGD L indicates that if overheating is predicted in DEAP (it does not presently), one should have regard to a CIBSE TM59 overheating assessment. However, Part L of the Building Regulations and in particular Technical Guidance Document [TGD L] 2022 Domestic retains an inherent anomaly. The energy and carbon performance is assessed using DEAP (Dublin Airport climate), but one must have overheating assessments assessed using CIBSE TM59 (DSY1 local climate) and daylighting IS EN 17037 (local climate).

2.14 To assess overheating based on one set of parameters, primary energy use on another and daylighting on yet another, the designer is faced with an intractable set of conflicting parameters.

### 3. STUDIO APARTMENT EXAMPLE

To reflect the potential impact of the PDSA 2025, I have used the LDA 2023 1-Person Studio (1A, 38m<sup>2</sup>) unit as a baseline to inform a reduced studio variant to match the proposed [2025 PDSA] area limit of 32m<sup>2</sup> to enable a comparative study of any impacts the reduction may have.



Figure 1 Floor plans of 32m<sup>2</sup> and 38m<sup>2</sup> Studio apartments

The living / kitchen / bedroom area was retained to be as large as possible, meeting the LDA 25m<sup>2</sup> min recommendation. The store was reduced to 1.5m<sup>2</sup>, meeting 50% of the 3m<sup>2</sup> required storage on the assumption that a further 1.5m<sup>2</sup> would be accommodated elsewhere in the complex. The shower room has been reduced but can meet Part M Irish Building Regulations Visitable requirements to facilitate less able persons.

Windows and doors were informed by the plan sizes indicated in the LDA Studio Type 1 A plan, retaining heights of 2.4m and 2.1m on the ground and upper floors respectively, but with a reduced width of the large window / door element.

Ceiling height for the ground floor apartment is set to 2.7m and 2.4m on the upper floors.

Units on ground, first and second floors, in the 4 primary orientations, had overheating and daylighting assessed. Overheating has been assessed using Met Eireann's DSY1 2021 Climate datasets and Daylighting using representative contemporary datasets for both Cork and Dublin locations.

In the modelling no external shading other than that provided by balconies over the ground floor are considered. No shading due to adjacent buildings or landscape features have been accounted for.



Figure 2 38m<sup>2</sup> Studio model

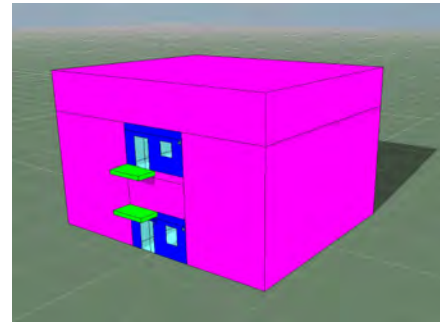


Figure 3 32m<sup>2</sup> Studio model

The models were assessed for overheating potential and changes in daylighting in two geographical locations – Cork & Dublin.

Energy Demand can vary significantly depending on geographic location. **Morehead, J., 2010.**, previously demonstrated that despite having the same BER rating, variations of up to 38% in Annual Head demand can be observed depending on a building's location in Ireland if assessed using a design tool such as the Passive House Planning Package (PHPP), which is reliant on relevant and localised climate data. Overheating potential is also influenced by climatic conditions.

The disparate response to overheating in the selected locations demonstrated the necessity for any design standards to accurately consider climate induced variations in environmental performance, be they contemporary or future predicted climate scenarios.

Although it may be argued that alternative arrangements and design solutions could deliver improved levels of daylighting or indeed reduced risk of overheating, this brief study clearly demonstrates how a holistic approach to any modifications to design standards is necessary and may have an environmental impact.

A significant number of the reduced size (32sqm) studios fail to meet the overheating criteria.

The unique results for each of 24 units highlight how the implementation of the [2025 PDSA] would generate significant changes to their Environmental and Climate impacts. The study is another example undermining the urgent necessity for the energy performance of buildings in Ireland to be assessed using methodologies that reflect the actual and future energy and carbon performance.

#### 4. OVERHEATING RISK

4.1 Technical Guidance Document L 2022 recommends that guidance is followed in CIBSE TM59, despite it being calculated using a much more sophisticated methodology, being dynamic, and to representative climate data. Interestingly TGD L also directs readers to TM57 where in-depth strategies such as cross ventilation are promoted to reduce solar induced overheating, yet it states in Section 1.3.2.4 that one should not reduce openings below the required provision for adequate daylighting stated in BS 8206-2, when reviewing the Daylight Factor

4.2 Overheating risk in residential properties in Ireland is assessed using CIBSE TM59 (2017). Compliance is based on passing *both* of the following two criteria:

4.3 Criteria A: *For living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms*: the number of hours during which DT is greater than or equal to one degree (K) during the period May to September inclusive shall not be more than 3 percent of occupied hours. (CIBSE TM52 Criterion 1: *Hours of exceedance*).

4.4 Criteria B: *For bedrooms only*: to guarantee comfort during the sleeping hours the operative temperature in the bedroom from 10 pm to 7 am shall not exceed 26 °C for more than 1% of annual hours. (*Note*: 1% of the annual hours between 22:00 and 07:00 for bedrooms is 32 hours, so 33 or more hours above 26 °C will be recorded as a fail).

4.5 Dynamic simulation modelling has been used to assess the overheating risk using IES VE 2025 software, based on category II buildings (new buildings with normal occupancy). The dwelling typologies studied are based on the LDA Studio 1A 38m<sup>2</sup> unit and a 32m<sup>2</sup> variant, if located in Cork or Dublin, in each of 4 orientations and on ground and upper floor levels. The Criterion A and Criterion B results of the study are available in Figure 4 & Figure 5 below. All bar one failed to meet the criteria for the 32m<sup>2</sup>, and worryingly, only 6 met the criteria for the 38m<sup>2</sup> unit. This is not unexpected for single aspect studios.

4.6 Thermal performances for opaque elements have been based on Part L 2019 max permitted values, with windows having  $U_w$  of 1.6W/m<sup>2</sup>K.

4.7 Colclough, Salaris 2023, identified that 20% of their monitored nZEB residences were failing the CIBSE TM59 standard. Overheating is becoming a significant concern in modern dwellings.

4.8 Although design tools are becoming more sophisticated and available Finegan, in his 2022 theses, carried out an empirical study of a single dwelling designed to the Passive house standard, which demonstrated that the simulated overheating frequency in PHPP is underestimated by a statistically significant margin when an average temperature is compared to localised zonal temperatures.

4.9 For regulatory assessment Finegan remarked that a similar emphasis should be deployed to overheating potential as it is to Energy Demand. Although a passive house project may report to have low overheating risk overall, certain rooms such as bedrooms may experience localised overheating. One bedroom in the Finnegan theses experienced overheating >26°C in excess of 69 days.

4.10 In **Washan, P.** (2019), a research report prepared by Aecom (for the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland), they identified that: *due to the lack of cross ventilation, single sided mid floor flats may be more at risk than say other dwelling types employed in their study.*

A ground floor flat is further limited in the ability to purge excessive heat through natural ventilation due to security concerns.

It was acknowledged that the choice of appropriate weather data was important to ensure that dwellings were fit for purpose. The report concluded with a recommendation that future weather files for simulations were made available for Ireland.

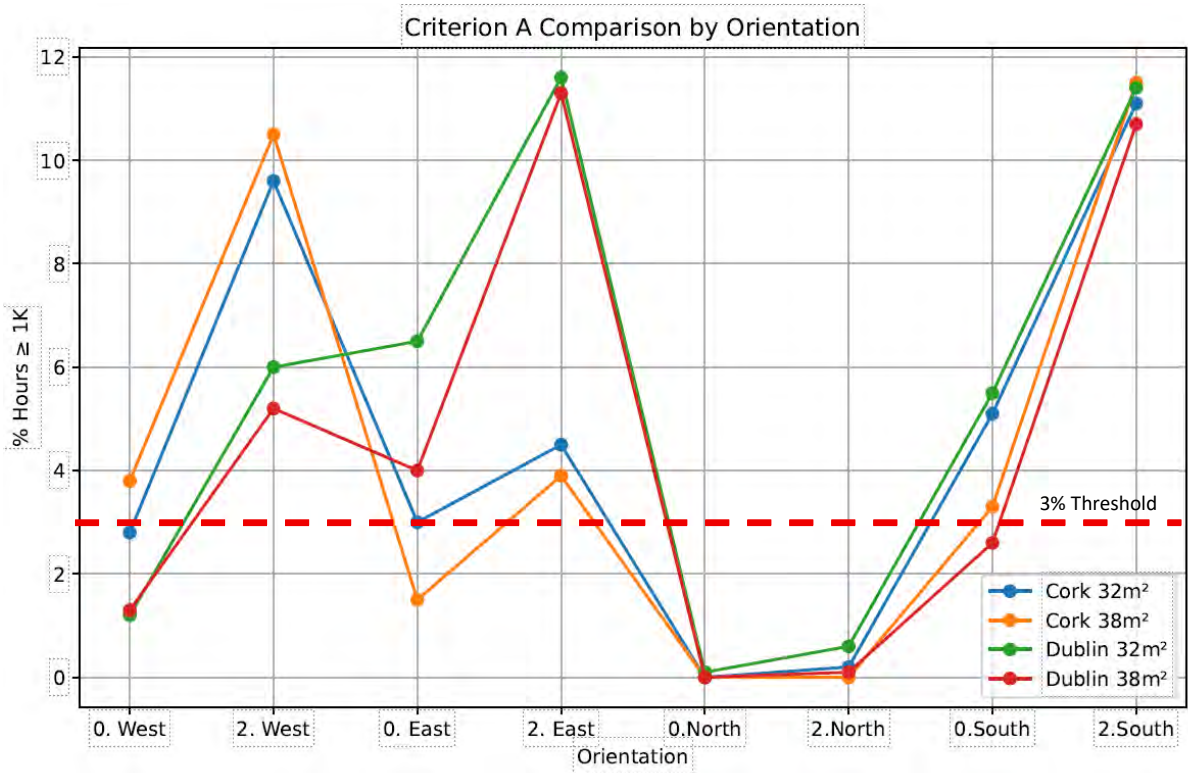


Figure 4 Criterion A CIBSE TM59 – J. Morehead

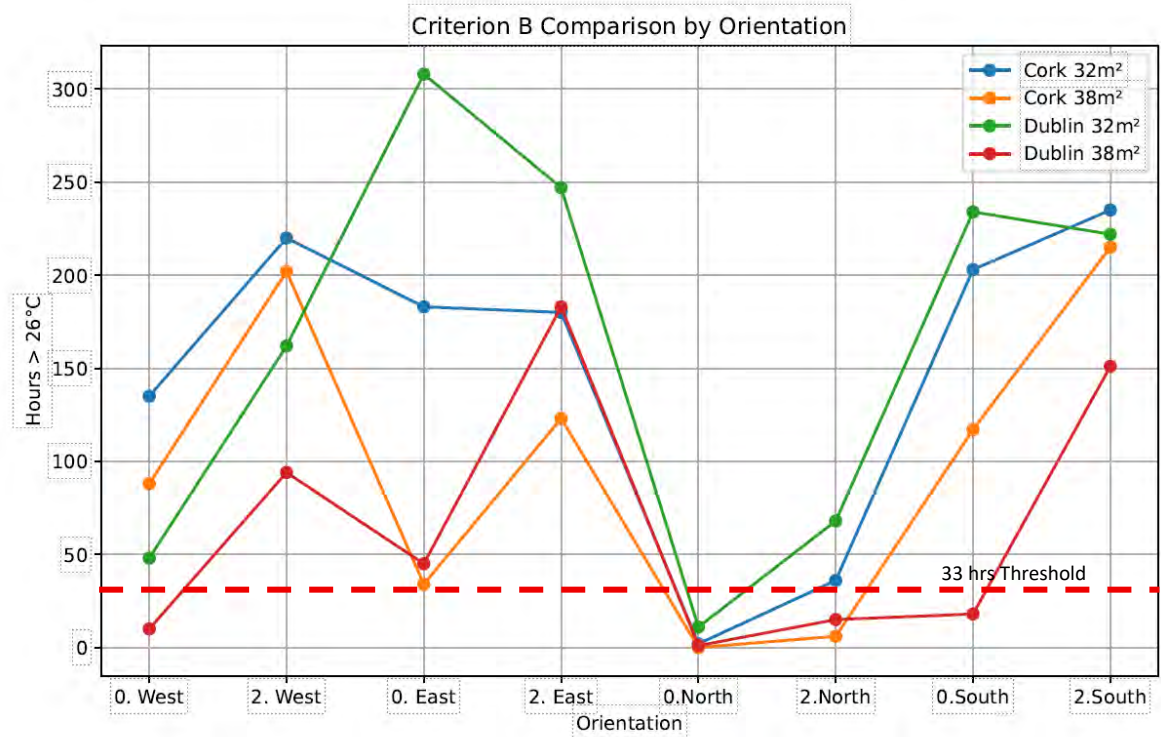


Figure 5 Criterion B CIBSE TM59 – J. Morehead

4.11 In 2023, Met **Eireann** published Climatological Note No.21, Climate data for use in Building Design – Past and Future weather files for Belmullet, Birr, Cloes, Cork, Dublin and Limerick for overheating risk assessment. The weather files included Design Summer Years (DSYs), reflecting particularly warm summers which stress building performance. The DSY1 file represents the 3<sup>rd</sup> warmest summer in a 20-year period for each location. The DSY1 files for Cork and Dublin were employed in the CIBSE TM59 element of this assessment. These datasets were used in the CIBSE TM59 calculations for the purposes of this study.

4.12 The East facing 32m<sup>2</sup> GF Studio (**0.East Dublin**) saw the most significant increase in overheating risk due to the reduction in apartment size, particularly in Criterion B. The hours where Bedroom temperatures are greater than 26°C increased from 183hrs to an extraordinarily uncomfortable 308hrs (threshold being 33 hrs). See appendix Figure 12.

4.13 The Cork 32m<sup>2</sup> Studios do not experience the same level of Criterion B overheating as Dublin, influenced by the more temperate climate experienced due to the gulf stream. Figure 10.

4.14 Both Cork and Dublin apartments experience significantly more overheating in the 32m<sup>2</sup> unit size. In Cork it is only the 32m<sup>2</sup> ground floor unit (0.North Cork) that meets both Criterion A and Criterion B, see Figure 10, however it fails the daylighting criteria. In Dublin the same unit type passes the overheating criteria with better daylighting values.

4.15 Overheating is generally a severe issue in all cardinal orientations but North. The Spatial Daylight Autonomy (SDA, further discussed in Section 5) values are marginally above the 50% threshold. It is my opinion that reducing daylighting provision to an acceptable threshold level will NOT reduce overheating significantly. The dwellings by virtue of their reduced size and single aspect will require significant cooling technology, increasing the energy demand and Global warming potential of the properties.

4.16 The capital, operational and maintenance costs associated with this cooling demand will be significant for such a small unit. The cooling demand will have a significant Global Warming Potential and will also contribute to the heat island effect in built up urban areas

## 5. DAYLIGHTING

5.1 Daylighting has been assessed in accordance with I.S. EN 17037:2018+A1:2021, Method 2. In our study we adopted the methodology that recommends the target illuminance values for a space combining multiple uses e.g. Living, Kitchen, Bedroom, is that of the room type with the highest value, in this case the kitchen, at 200 lx – as compiled by Brian O’Brien in his article for RIAI 2024 in Figure 6. I have also calculated the Daylight Factor to BS 8206-2 using FlucsDL in IESVE modelling software for reference.

Room function (type)	Target illuminance	Minimum Average Daylight factor
Bedroom	100	1.0
Living room	150	1.5
Kitchen (or any space containing a kitchen area)	200	2.0

Source: Based on page 66 of UK National Annex to BS EN17037 and Table 3 of BS 8206-2

Figure 6 NA.2 Min daylighting provision in UK dwelling & Table NA.1 IS EN 17037 – Brian O’Brien, 2024

5.2 **Spatial Daylight Autonomy (sDA)** is a metric used to evaluate the quality of daylight in indoor spaces. It measures the percentage of a space that receives **sufficient daylight** for a specified portion of the day. Daylight should illuminate spaces during a significant fraction of the annual daylight hours over a year. Daylight availability is site specific, impacted upon by geographic location and surrounding environment, the daylight opening arrangements (e.g. windows) and the interior layout. Reducing the area provision for a given dwelling type can compromise not only the ergonomic layouts but also the overall spatial and daylighting qualities within.

Adequate daylight is assumed if a target illuminance is achieved across a fraction of the reference plane (0.85m above floor level in this case). Exposure to sunlight has a significant impact on human wellbeing, and assessments of view out and glare protection may also be considered under I.S. EN 17037.

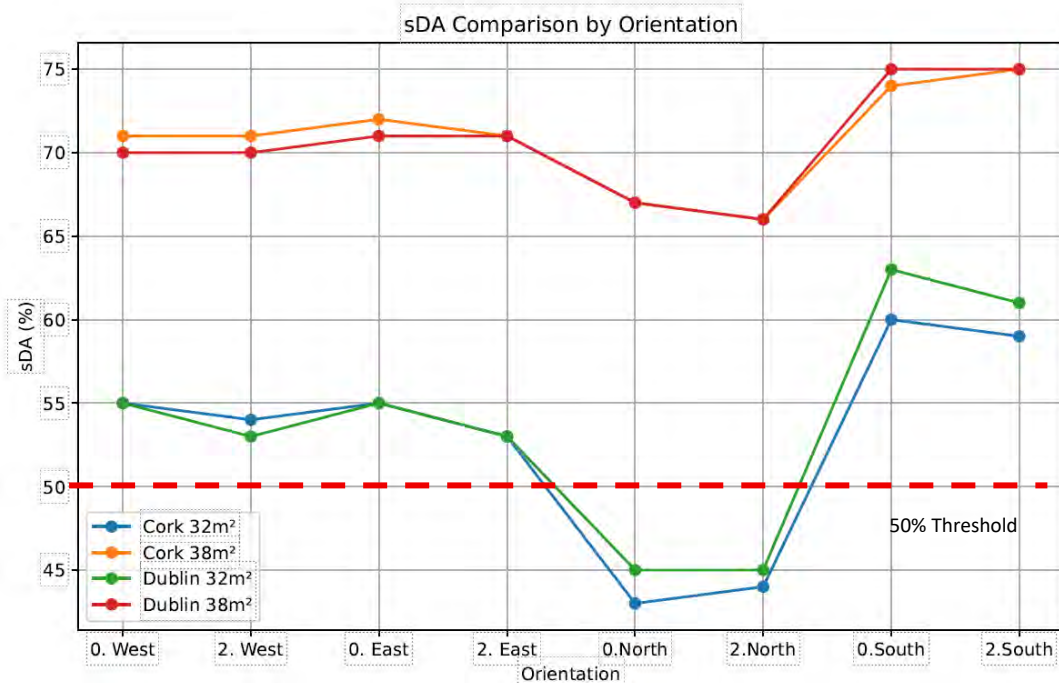


Figure 7 Spatial Daylight Autonomy ISEN 17037- J.Morehead / Solearth

In Figure 7, the level of daylight reduction in both the Cork and Dublin locations due to the reduced apartment size is significant. Although glazed areas were marginally reduced to offset increased overheating potential, they achieve daylight levels just above the 50% threshold in the east and west

orientations. As is detailed elsewhere, that reduction was not enough to address overheating. The windows to the north could be increased as they are below the threshold, but doing so will have energy and carbon impacts as heat load and annual heat demand will increase in winter due to higher glazed areas and associated heat losses.

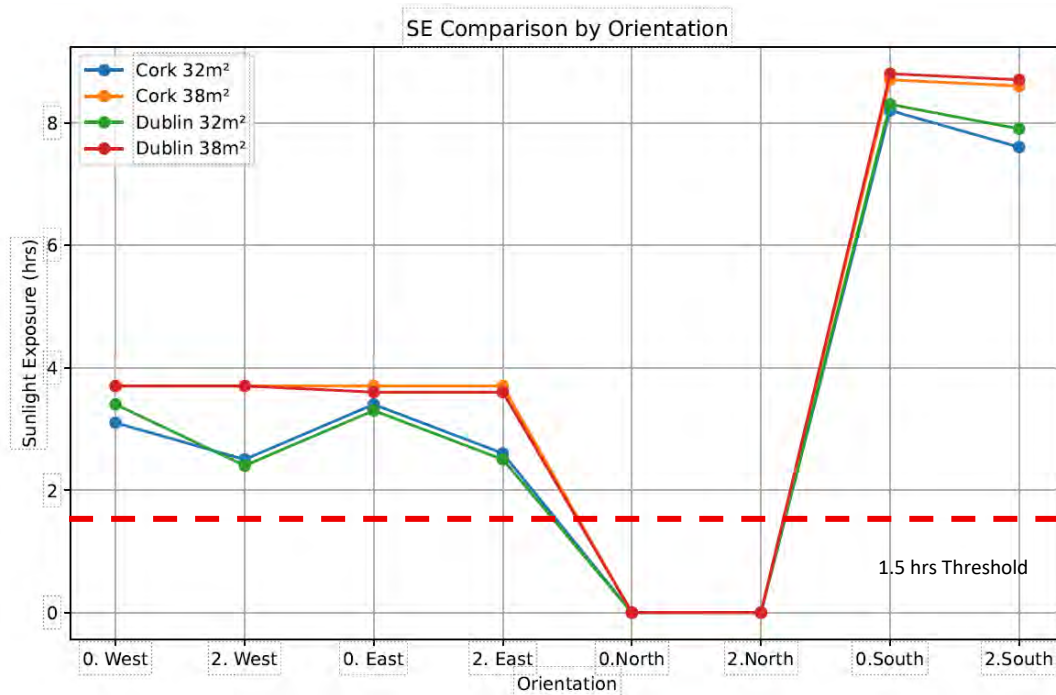


Figure 8 Sunlight Exposure ISEN 17037- J.Morehead / Solearth

5.3 **Sunlight Exposure (SE)** is a metric defined in **EN 17037**, the European standard for daylight in buildings. It measures the amount of **direct sunlight** a space receives on a **representative day**, typically the **21st of March**. It quantifies how many hours of direct sunlight reach a specific point in a room and is especially relevant for living spaces where access to sunlight contributes to comfort, well-being, and circadian rhythm regulation.

These thresholds, as outlined below help designers assess whether a space meets daylight quality standards.

- SE Thresholds (EN 17037):
- Minimum:  $\geq 1.5$  hours
- Medium:  $\geq 3$  hours
- High:  $\geq 4$  hours

In Figure 8, the variation in sunlight exposure in each studio reflects the fenestration pattern and on the ground floors, the provision of balconies which act as an obstruction to sunlight rays entering the units. The reduction in sunlight penetration on the upper floors is a result of the reduced window provision reducing solar gains. Sunlight exposure has reduced to a minimum level on the upper floors and a medium level on the lower floors as they avail of more sky view due to higher window head heights.

The negative impact a 32m<sup>2</sup> Studio has on direct sunlight could be reduced by the adjustment of the fenestration solution, and may require the use of external blinds, louvres, or brise soleil to achieve the desired sunlight penetration and solar gain reduction. These external shading devices come at a monetary and carbon cost which may offset any savings in floor area reduction. The variations in Sunlight Exposure between the locations are largely impacted upon by latitude and solar elevation.

## **6. STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY REQUIREMENTS**

### **6.1 SPPR 1: Unit Mix**

- 6.1.1 This SPPR effectively lifts any restrictions on the unit mix previously provided in any single scheme apartment development. There is no longer any effective maximum or minimum requirement for apartments having a certain number of beds to be delivered. The rental yield for smaller apartments or Studios per m<sup>2</sup> floor area in Ireland are significantly higher than for larger units (Hegarty, 2025).
- 6.1.2 With this SPPR one can expect more single developments with a significant increase in the provision of 1 person Studio units. Therefore, the potential exists for a significant increase in the Embodied Carbon necessary to construct such accommodation on a per person basis. The Key Performance Indicators developed to encourage building efficiency in the LDA apartment typology booklet 2023 had a target of 76-88m<sup>2</sup> for the average gross floor area per apartment in a single development.
- 6.1.3 Although it may be argued that many of the 1 person Studios could be occupied by 2 persons, the 32m<sup>2</sup> unit is clearly not designed for such occupation and internal heat gains will be increased accordingly. Heat gains in CIBSE TM59 are assessed on an occupancy / per person basis, and are the same as a 1bed 2-person apartment. Reducing apartment sizes will therefore not reduce the internal gains either in use or when assessed using the TM59 methodology.
- 6.1.4 My review demonstrates how the reduction in floor areas to 32m<sup>2</sup> for the 1-person Studio will significantly increase overheating potential and reduce daylight access, uniquely responsive to location in Figure 4 & Figure 5 above.
- 6.1.5 The reduction in Studio apartment size from 38 to 32m<sup>2</sup> will increase the risk of overheating necessitating the provision of increased mechanical and cooling requirements with associated embodied and operational carbon requirements.

## **6.2 SPPR 2: Floor Area Reduction**

- 6.2.1 SPPR 2 stipulates the minimum areas for a 1-person (not 1 bed) unit at 32m<sup>2</sup>, some 6m<sup>2</sup> less than the Land Development Agency (2023) Apartment Typology Booklet example.
- 6.2.2 Floor areas impact upon unit volume and air space in individual apartments and studios. At the 2.4m ceiling height, the reduction in volume in comparison to the LDA Type 1A Studio unit could be 16% alone. The ceiling height requirements are addressed in SPPR 4.
- 6.2.3 Reducing the overall floor area can therefore contribute to less dilution of stale air and increases in CO<sub>2</sub>ppm levels.
- 6.2.4 The Thermal Mass and overall heating resistance is reduced in the 32m<sup>2</sup> studio apartment as both ceiling height (permitting 2.4m ceiling heights ) and floor area reductions give rise to reduced thermal mass thereby increased overheating potential.
- 6.2.5 The reduction in floor areas will significantly increase the risk of overheating and in many cases require additional cooling technologies and the provision of additional shading devices with their associated costs and Global Warming Potential.
- 6.2.6 The cost per m<sup>2</sup> is likely to increase as fixed costs such as plant, domestic hot water provision, lighting etc will not be reduced.
- 6.2.7 Adequate daylighting and sunlight exposure will be more difficult to provide. More complex and costly measures will be needed.

### 6.3 SPPR 3 – Dual Aspect

- 6.3.1 Reducing the provision of dual aspect apartments by 50% (suburban or intermediate) can reduce Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ), due to the potential for overheating and poor air quality. In central and accessible urban locations due to heat islands and poorer external air quality, the further reduction in provision of dual aspect from 33% to 25% is potentially more significant. This is particularly critical in the 1-person studio where the provision of adequate levels of natural ventilation to living, sleeping, cooking areas, is by its nature limiting, despite the intermittent mechanical extract requirement to wet areas.
- 6.3.2 With the advent of nZEB and superior envelope performance, single aspect apartments are even more vulnerable to overheating and less favourable IEQ conditions. All of the 32m<sup>2</sup> Studio variants bar 2 No. northerly units in Cork and 1 No. northerly unit in Dublin failed to meet the requirements of TM59(2017). They predominantly failed Criterion B where the operative temperatures in the Living / Kitchen / Bedroom area between 20:00 - 07:00 hours exceeded 26°C for more than 1% of the annual hours (33 hrs is a failure), with many cases exceeding 200hrs.
- 6.3.3 The baseline model 38m<sup>2</sup> Studio also demonstrated significant variations in performance dependent on location. Although in certain circumstances and orientations, dual aspect can increase overheating potential due to the additional direction of solar access, this can be offset with design interventions, such as appropriate glazing specification and window sizing. In general, single aspect will certainly increase overheating risk. The provision of additional cooling technologies will be essential for smaller deep plan configurations.
- 6.3.4 A key benefit of dual aspect is cross ventilation which increases cooling potential and improves IEQ significantly. Dual aspect also aids in achieving the necessary levels of daylighting from more favourable cardinal orientations.
- 6.3.5 **Greater London Authority (GLA)**, 2018, recommend the use of external balconies for single aspect one-bedroom apartments to reduce overheating. Purge ventilation is readily available via balcony access openings.
- 6.3.6 Although the guidance relating to Private Amenity Space in PDSA 2025 section 3.8, acknowledges the importance of balconies and their impact on solar shading, their provision is no longer a requirement.
- 6.3.7 In GLA, 2018 it is noted that the reliance on solar reduction by glazing specification and g-Factor may work for commercial units but is not desirable where outlook in a residential setting is desired. It is clear that 40% solar reduction glazing offers poor colour and daylight rendering for the occupant.
- 6.3.8 The increased risk of overheating in single aspect apartments will certainly result in an increase in the Global Warming Potential of the unit.

#### **6.4 SPPR 4: Ceiling Height**

- 6.4.1 When Regulatory bodies specify limits, these limits often become the target. Lower ceiling heights mean less air volume within a space, resulting in less potential to dilute pollutants from occupants and associated activities. Reduced ceiling height also impacts upon natural ventilation (e.g. stack effect) which relies on vertical space for air movement. Lower ceilings reduce the pressure differential that drives airflow, making passive cooling less effective. I expect that mechanical ventilation with increased airflow may be necessary in these smaller units. The provision of mechanical ventilation will increase the Embodied and Operational Carbon per unit.
- 6.4.2 Although one may expect that any reduction in floor area may reduce overall costs, this is not always the case as the unit retains high-cost elements such as kitchen, bathroom and servicing provisions. There is a point where the cost/m<sup>2</sup> increases to a level offsetting the savings due to area reduction – the £10 matchbox effect.
- 6.4.3 Smaller volumes promote less dilution of contaminants, carbon dioxide, odours etc impacting upon Indoor Air Quality, necessitating additional ventilation technologies being employed to improve IEQ with the associated Global warming potential, Climate and Environmental impacts.
- 6.4.4 Reduced wall heights reduce thermal mass and the unit's ability to retain temperatures / and efficiencies with nighttime cooling.
- 6.4.5 Reduced ceiling heights reduce the stratification effect of thermal layers within the apartment, pushing heat down to the occupant
- 6.4.6 Reduced ceiling heights will require in-depth studies to determine impact upon Sunlight Exposure, general daylighting and operational & embodied energy.
- 6.4.7 In urban situations the lower floor may have difficulty accessing adequate daylighting, particularly in deep plan forms.

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8. APPENDIX

8.1 Cork 38 m<sup>2</sup> and 32 m<sup>2</sup> Overheating and Daylighting Tabulated

Studio 38m2	Cork								
	TM59: 2017				Daylight Factor		sDA	SE	Result
	Criterion A		Criterion B		P/F	%	%	hrs	
	P/F	%hrs >= 1°K	P/F	hrs > 32					
0. West	F	3.8	F	88	P	2.6	71	3.7	
2. West	F	10.5	F	202	P	2.8	71	3.7	X
0. East	P	1.5	F	34	P	2.5	72	3.7	X
2. East	F	3.9	F	123	P	2.9	71	3.7	X
0.North	P	0.0	P	0	P	2.5	67	0	X
2.North	P	0.0	P	6	P	2.8	66	0	X
0.South	F	3.3	F	117	P	2.7	74	8.7	X
2.South	F	11.5	F	215	P	3.1	75	8.6	X

Figure 9 38m<sup>2</sup> Studio Cork Overheating and Daylighting by orientation

Studio 32m2	Cork								
	TM59: 2017				Daylight Factor		sDA	SE	Result
	Criterion A		Criterion B		P/F	%	%	hrs	
	P/F	%hrs >= 1°K	P/F	hrs > 32					
0. West	P	2.8	F	135	P	2.2	55	3.1	
2. West	F	9.6	F	220	P	2.6	54	2.5	X
0. East	P	3.0	F	183	P	2.3	55	3.4	X
2. East	F	4.5	F	180	P	2.7	53	2.6	X
0.North	P	0.0	P	2	F	1.8	43	0	X
2.North	P	0.2	F	36	P	2.6	44	0	X
0.South	F	5.1	F	203	P	2.4	60	8.2	X
2.South	F	11.1	F	235	P	2.8	59	7.6	X

Figure 10 32m<sup>2</sup> Studio Cork Overheating and Daylighting by orientation

**8.2 Dublin 38 m2 and 32 m2 Overheating and Daylighting Tabulated**

Studio 38m2	Dublin									
	TM59: 2017				BS 8206-2		Daylight Factor	sDA	SE	Result
	Criterion A		Criterion B		P/F	%				
	P/F	%hrs >= 1°K	P/F	hrs > 32			hrs			
0. West	P	1.3	P	10	P	2.6	70	3.7	✓	
2. West	F	5.2	F	94	P	2.8	70	3.7	X	
0. East	F	4.0	F	45	P	2.5	71	3.6	X	
2. East	F	11.3	F	183	P	2.9	71	3.6	X	
0.North	P	0.0	P	1	P	2.5	67	0	X	
2.North	P	0.1	P	15	P	2.8	66	0	X	
0.South	P	2.6	P	18	P	2.7	75	8.8	✓	
2.South	F	10.7	F	151	P	3.1	75	8.7	X	

Figure 11 38m<sup>2</sup> Studio Dublin Overheating and Daylighting by orientation

Studio 32m2	Dublin									
	TM59: 2017				BS 8206-2		Daylight Factor	sDA	SE	Result
	Criterion A		Criterion B		P/F	%				
	P/F	%hrs >= 1°K	P/F	hrs > 32			hrs			
0. West	P	1.2	F	48	P	2.3	55	3.4	X	
2. West	F	6.0	F	162	P	2.6	53	2.4	X	
0. East	F	6.5	F	308	P	2.3	55	3.3	X	
2. East	F	11.6	F	247	P	2.7	53	2.5	X	
0.North	P	0.1	P	11	P	2.2	45	0	X	
2.North	P	0.6	F	68	P	2.6	45	0	X	
0.South	F	5.5	F	234	P	2.4	63	8.3	X	
2.South	F	11.4	F	222	P	2.8	61	7.9	X	

Figure 12 32m<sup>2</sup> Studio Dublin Overheating and Daylighting by orientation

-END-

## **Appendix 3**

**Potential Health Impacts of the**  
**Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines**  
**for Planning Authorities, 2025**

**1. Introduction**

The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>1</sup> Health is shaped not only by healthcare services but also by wider social, economic and environmental conditions (known as the social determinants of health, Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Research evidence indicates that healthcare accounts for only around 15% of overall health outcomes, with the majority of health being determined by the conditions in which people live and the behaviours they adopt within these conditions.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, 90% of the differences in health status between people (health inequalities) based on socioeconomic status can be attributed to differences in the conditions in which people live.<sup>4</sup> A recent analysis of European countries highlights the importance of embedding health considerations across all policy areas, not just the health sector.<sup>5</sup> Countries that adopted such “Health in All Policies” approaches sustained improvements in population health since 1990 when other countries didn’t and were better prepared to withstand the COVID-19 pandemic. By contrast, neglecting health in policy-making can foster an unhealthy population, generating unsustainable social, economic, and environmental costs that are ultimately borne by future generations.<sup>6</sup>

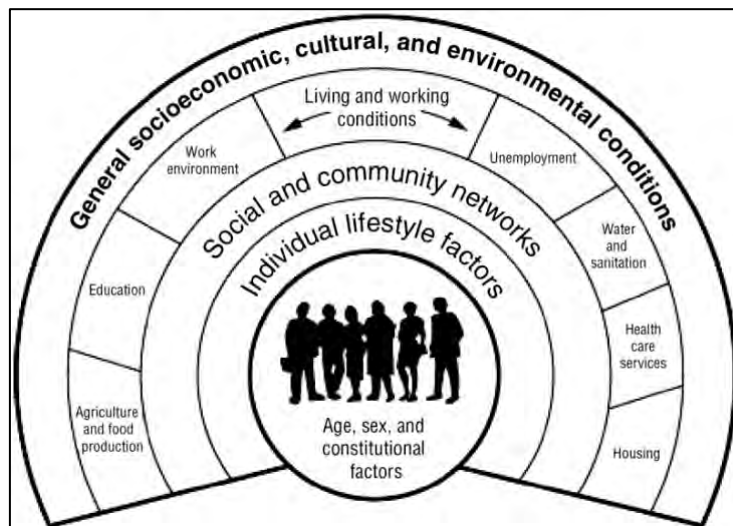


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Social Determinants of Health

In Ireland, the importance of ensuring that development protects and promotes health is recognised in the National Planning Framework<sup>7</sup> and reflected in the longstanding inclusion of health as a core consideration across planning and environmental legislation.<sup>8</sup> Housing standards are fundamental to ensuring new housing developments at a minimum do not harm public health. Housing (including inadequate supply) affects the entire population and future generations. People spend most of their time in their homes<sup>9,10</sup>, remaining in continuous close contact with them as a health exposure. Therefore, the adverse health effects of poor-quality housing can be difficult to mitigate or offset by other means.

To avoid population-level health impacts related to housing standards, any changes to them should be considered carefully because even a small increase in risk applied to a large number of people can generate a significant overall burden of disease, even when the risk to any one individual may appear low (the Rose principle – a widely accepted principle in public health<sup>11</sup>).

## **2. Methodology**

The potential health impacts of the Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025<sup>12</sup> (referred to as “the Guidelines” hereafter) were assessed using the Institute of Public Health’s guidance on screening proposals for health impacts.<sup>13</sup> This process involves examining how the Guidelines could potentially influence risks to health and then assessing both the likelihood and significance of such changes for health. Likelihood refers to how plausible (according to scientific evidence) and how probable (based on one’s judgement) it is that the proposal will lead to a change in health. Significance refers to whether any changes in health are important or unacceptable considering factors such as the baseline health of the population, the policy context, and the scientific evidence.

### **3. Screening Assessment**

The assessment identified potential likely and significant effects on health from the Guidelines via their influence on the following determinants of health:

- a) Housing conditions – crowding
- b) Housing conditions – lighting
- c) Community cohesion - social Isolation and loneliness

#### a) Housing Conditions – Crowding

According to the World Health Organization, crowding is a condition where the number of occupants exceeds the capacity of the dwelling space available, whether measured as rooms, bedrooms or floor area, resulting in adverse physical and mental health outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

Crowding arises from a mismatch between household needs and the available housing stock. The removal of restrictions in statutory plans regarding the mix of unit sizes and types, the number of bedrooms, and the reduction in the minimum floor area for studio apartments may increase the risk that new developments may not meet the needs of the population. Census 2022 data show that while only 8.4% of households are single-person, the majority live in households of three or more people, including 24.6% in households of four and 16.3% in households of five (Table 1).<sup>14</sup> Without adequate alignment of apartment provision to household size, there may be a heightened risk of crowding, especially in the context of limited housing availability.

People in Household (N)	Proportion of Population (%)
1	8.4
2	21.1
3	19.5
4	24.6
5	16.3
6 or more	10

Data Source: Central Statistics Office<sup>14</sup>

### *Physical Health Effects*

It is plausible that the Guidelines could increase crowding within apartments, thereby raising the risk of communicable respiratory diseases. Scientific evidence consistently shows that crowding facilitates the transmission of influenza, pneumonia, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and tuberculosis.<sup>10</sup> Where reduced space standards create conditions for crowding and higher disease spread, such impacts are reasonably judged as probable and therefore likely. The potential significance is high given Ireland's public health context: influenza, pneumonia, and RSV already are major causes of poor public health, placing major seasonal pressures on the health system, necessitating large-scale vaccination programmes and specific measures by the HSE to manage health care demand.<sup>15</sup> Regarding tuberculosis, cases are rising in Ireland<sup>16</sup>, and housing conditions that heighten transmission risk could directly undermine the national strategy to end tuberculosis.<sup>17</sup>

### *Mental Health Effects*

It is plausible that the Guidelines could increase crowding within apartments, and there is strong scientific evidence linking crowding to poorer mental health outcomes. Research shows that crowded living environments are associated with psychological distress, alcohol misuse, depression, and lower self-rated health.<sup>10</sup> Where policy changes reduce space standards and create conditions for crowding, it is reasonable to judge the resulting mental health impacts as probable and therefore likely. The implications are potentially significant: around one in eight people in Ireland experience a mental health problem, with young people particularly affected.<sup>18</sup> Mental health is shaped by multiple social and environmental factors<sup>19</sup>, and the Healthy Ireland Framework recognises the need for cross-sectoral action to address these determinants and reduce the burden of poor mental health.<sup>20</sup> A potential increase in crowding in the population leading to worse population mental health could be significant in this context.

#### b) Housing Conditions – Lighting

The World Health Organization recognise sufficient household lighting, both natural and artificial, as a determinant of health.<sup>21</sup> The Guidelines, by reducing ground-level ceiling heights, reducing the proportion of dual aspect units and influencing the number of units per floor per core could potentially reduce the exposure of people living in apartments to natural lighting.

### *Physical Health Effects*

It is plausible based on research evidence that the Guidelines could increase the risk of falls among older people by reducing natural light level exposure. Most falls among older people occur in the home, and inadequate lighting is a well-recognised environmental factor.<sup>22,23</sup> Evidence from the World Health Organization's Large Analysis and Review of European Housing and Health Survey (LARES), a large cross-sectional study in eight European cities, found that the likelihood of falling was 2.5 times higher among people who reported inadequate natural lighting in their homes, even after controlling for major confounders.<sup>24</sup> It is reasonable to judge the effect of the Guidelines on falls as probable and therefore a likely effect.

Such an effect could be potentially significant. Data from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) show that nearly 40% of adults over 50 experience a fall over a four-year period, with nearly 20% requiring hospital attendance.<sup>25</sup> Falls among older people are associated with severe health outcomes including major morbidity, disability, hospitalisation, institutionalisation, and even mortality.<sup>26</sup> The economic cost of these falls adds to their significance, particularly in the wider context of escalating health and social care costs nationally.<sup>27,28</sup> One analysis projected that the annual economic cost of falls in Ireland would be over €2 billion by 2030.<sup>29</sup> With Ireland's population ageing<sup>30</sup>, the burden of falls will continue to grow, making prevention a public health priority. The existence of the National Fall and Fracture Prevention Strategy underscores the national importance attributed to the issue of falls as a public health priority to address.<sup>31</sup>

### *Mental Health & Wellbeing Effects*

It is plausible that the Guidelines could negatively affect population mental health by reducing access to natural light. Natural light is essential for wellbeing, regulating circadian rhythms and influencing sleep, mood, and overall quality of life.<sup>32,33</sup> A large longitudinal study of over 500,000 adults in the United Kingdom found that each additional hour spent in daylight exposure was associated with a lower lifetime risk of depression, low mood and neuroticism.<sup>34</sup> The World Health Organization's LARES study found that inadequate household daylight was associated with a 1.4-fold higher likelihood of depression.<sup>24</sup> Given the direct pathway between reduced light exposure and mental health impacts, it is reasonable to judge such effects as probable and therefore a likely consequence of the Guidelines. Considering the high prevalence of poor mental health in the population<sup>18</sup>, the high-level

policies aimed at addressing it<sup>20,35</sup> and the general evidence supporting the relationship between natural light access and mental health and wellbeing, a reduction in natural light access among large numbers of the population could potentially be a significant effect.

c) Community Cohesion - Social Isolation and Loneliness

The removal of restrictions on the mix of unit sizes and the threshold-based approach for new communal, community and cultural facilities within apartment schemes may alter family structures and relationships and reduce opportunities for community interaction. These changes could increase social isolation and loneliness. Proximity to social supports and amenities is well-established as an important factor in people's social participation.<sup>36</sup>

*Physical and Mental Health Effects*

It is plausible that an increase in social isolation and loneliness could affect population health. There is consistent systematic review and meta-analysis-level evidence that both social isolation and loneliness are associated with a significantly increased risk of all-cause mortality and cancer mortality and that social isolation is strongly associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality.<sup>37,38,39</sup> Systematic review and meta-analysis level evidence suggests poor social connectedness is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke.<sup>40</sup> A systematic review and meta-analysis of 65 longitudinal studies found that social isolation was also associated with cognitive decline.<sup>41</sup> There is consistent evidence from meta-analyses that being socially connected is associated with a lower risk of dementia.<sup>42,43,44</sup> Meta-analyses of longitudinal studies indicate that poor social connectedness is associated with an increased risk of depression.<sup>39</sup> There is substantial evidence that social isolation and loneliness are associated with major causes of poor physical, cognitive and mental health and poorer quality of life among older people.<sup>45</sup> Considering the strong research evidence and the potential for the Guidelines to alter people's home and community environments, it is plausible and probable that such effects are likely.

These effects are potentially significant. Social isolation and loneliness are already highly prevalent in Ireland. In a national longitudinal study of adults age over 50 in Ireland, almost one third experienced emotional loneliness at least some of the time and nearly 40% were categorised as being socially isolated to some degree.<sup>46</sup> Living alone was associated with being lonely and socially isolated. Social isolation and loneliness become more prevalent

later in life and in the context of Ireland's ageing population will grow as factors contributing to major public health problems such as cardiovascular disease, stroke and dementia. The Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025 specifically identifies addressing loneliness as a public health priority.<sup>47</sup>

#### **4. Screening Conclusion**

Based on this screening assessment, the Guidelines have the potential to affect population health in a likely and significant way via their influence on housing conditions and community cohesion. Consistent with a precautionary approach to public health and environmental assessment, a full analysis of the likelihood and significance of the effects of the Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2025 on health should be conducted as part of an integrated wider assessment of the effects on the environment.

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## **Appendix 4**



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## **Planning Design Standards for Apartments, July 2025**

### **Report on the potential impacts on human health of the Standards for Apartments Guidelines**

#### **Introduction**

In the First Century BCE, Vitruvius described the quality that buildings should have as “*strength, utility and grace*”. Half a millennium later, Leonardo da Vinci’s designs for cities promoted public health and well-being in the environmental and social context. After another 600 years, Richard Neutra, an Austrian architect, in the 1920s believed that architecture could impact the mental health of its occupants. Frank Lloyd Wright took a more fatalistic view, noting that while surgeons could bury their mistakes, architects could only plant vines to hide them. Winston Churchill said in 1943 “*We shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us.*”

Since then, the causal link between built environment and health – both physical and mental – has been studied in depth. From the disease-ridden tenements of cities of the 1900s to the mental alienation of the vast post-second world war estates, the evidence of the environmental impact of the built environment is obvious and well understood. The demolition of the 11-storey Pruitt-Igoe estate in Saint Louis in 1972 marked the recognition that building design and use are central to well-being or the lack thereof. Closer to home, the demolition of the Ballymun Towers in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, marked the failure of housing policies that were not connected to space standards, but management and social policies.

In half a century of my own work in housing, I have witnessed at first hand the influence that the built environment has on human well-being. Some of my work concerned mitigating overcrowding issues in, generally, local authority housing. The crucial factors of daylight, ventilation, privacy, access to nature, social engagement with others, adequacy of space and the quality of the surrounding public realm, to name but some of the most important ones, are central to the success or failure of the work that I do.

In the context of urban settlements, one of the most central factors is density. This can be measured in a number of conflicting ways.

One is residential units per hectare – the measure used in the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines. 500 one-person units might appear to be twice as efficient as 250 two-person units, but both house the same number of people.

Another measure is bed-spaces per hectare. This possibly gives better data on the numbers housed, but both of these measures only relate to single development sites – they do not include all of the surrounding lands needed for access, amenity, and all of the other uses that are central to successful places. It is also a challenge to forecast the actual numbers who might occupy a unit.

My own preference is to measure the density in terms of people per square kilometre, as this gives a far better indication of the liveability of a place and the critical mass needed to be able to support communal facilities, infrastructure and positive health outcomes. Dublin City and Suburbs (as measured by the Central Statistics Office) currently has an overall population density of some 5,000 people per square km (ppsk), ranging from some 12,000 ppsk in the Merchants Quay Ward to some 2,500 ppsk in outer suburbs.

A density of some 6,500 ppsk would be comparable to Copenhagen, a city that is often cited as a good example of urban planning. That density is also a number that supports the idea of the 15 minute city, with the numbers needed to support common infrastructure. Cross-referring this back to units per hectare, this population density would indicate a uph of some 65 units, of a reasonable unit mix.

### **Effects of lower design standards in housing on health**<sup>1</sup>

The Planning Design Standards for Apartments, issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2025 (Standards for Apartment Guidelines) introduced a range of Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) that reduced the design standards contained in previous guidelines. In future, Planning Authorities must comply with these reduced design standards, irrespective of the standards contained in their local Development Plans.

In essence, these SPPRs restrict the mix of unit sizes, types and bedroom numbers; reduce the sizes of apartments; reduce the number of dual aspect apartments; reduce the ceiling heights; remove criteria for the number of apartments per service core (stairs, lift, etc.); reduce the communal facilities of apartment blocks; re-introduce co-living; remove the requirement for en-suite bathrooms in PBSA blocks with reduced space standards. While not a specific SPPR, the guidelines permit the reduction of private balconies in up to 50% of units, contrary to previous Section 28 SPPRs. All of these affect our lives.

As well as my own worked experience, there is an abundance of research data which examines the effect of lower design standards in housing on physical and mental health.

The World Health Organisation published, in 2018, its Housing and Health Guidelines. While these were of a worldwide nature, they did clearly link the connection between built environment and health outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

A more detailed European look in nine countries at the health, social, environmental and economic trends concluded that space standards should be revised upwards. This comprehensive research, published in the International Journal of Environmental research and Public Health considered that *“The international trend anticipates the increase of the average housing size, at least in developed countries, both for objective (e.g., sufficient circulation space) and subjective reasons (e.g., claustrophobia problems, infectious diseases prevention, but also private space for working). Today, it is well known that people’s perception of internal space is only partially correlated to its amount, being also related to age and gender. Now, there is limited research on the appropriate size of housing and on its relevance in terms of health, safety, and people’s wellbeing. The needs evolve during time and housing regulations are frequently rigid and unable to be adapted; lower income population groups are those who mainly pay the consequences for this. At the same time, it must be argued that the aspects relating to the size of housing, combined with the adequate sunlight and*

<sup>1</sup> <https://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/id/eprint/111325/1/WRAP-WHO-housing-health-guidelines-Ormandy-2018.pdf>

*external view, are of particular importance today, also considering the criticalities overwhelmingly emerged during the recent Covid-19 pandemic.”<sup>2</sup>*

The study by Ade Kearns in 2021 on housing space and occupancy standards in the United Kingdom concluded that “.....research findings could be provided which would support the development of more rigorous, enforceable standards of domestic space and occupancy for the benefit of quality of life, health and wellbeing, and the productivity of society in the future. The recent impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on inequalities in health and human capital make this even more relevant for the future.”<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, a 2022 study of assessing design policies in Australia, while not reaching a citable conclusion, contains useful details studies of three cities.<sup>4</sup>

Another 2023 Australian study on The Architecture of Mental Health on the positive aspects of design and health noted in its introduction that “Housing quality is a crucial determinant of mental health. While the construction of high-rise buildings is a popular policy strategy for accommodating population growth in cities, there is considerable debate about the health consequences of living in poorly designed apartments. Drawing on three Australian state government apartment design policies introduced to improve apartment design quality, this study aimed to identify the combination of design requirements that were optimally supportive of positive mental health.”<sup>5</sup>

The above studies are but a small selection of the research that links reduced apartment design standards with poor health outcomes. It is clear that reducing design standards, such as space minima, light, ventilation, amenity and variety, leads to negative environmental outcomes. These include poorer health and wellbeing, lower satisfaction, increased social exclusion, decline in overall housing and urban quality, without a corresponding increase in affordability and greater demands on the resources of the biosphere.

My own experience over the years of practice in the residential sector, including re-use, adaptation and conservation of the built environment confirms that, for every reduction in design standards for housing, there is a subsequent diminution of wellbeing, including poor physical and mental health outcomes.

There is also a reduction in the quality of the built environment, shifting costs from construction budgets (which are never, in my experience, passed on to the inhabitants) to the public health systems. Maintaining – or increasing – standards leads to healthier, more resilient, socially stable communities.

## **The Standards for Apartments Guidelines**

The combined impact of the eight mandatory SPPRs, as well as the guidance allowing for the omission of balconies for half of the residents of a project, will, in my opinion, lead to an unacceptable reduction in residential amenity of the occupants of these projects. Inadequate social

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2

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8073340/#:~:text=The%20housing%20standards%20of,need%2C%20in%20terms%20of>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epub/10.1080/09613218.2021.2024756?needAccess=true>

4

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0360132321008891#:~:text=to%20enhancing%20sleep%20patterns%2C,and%2040%25%2C%20respectively.3%2C6%20Our>

5

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10320597/#:~:text=the%20combination%20of%20design,supportive%20of%20positive%20mental>

mix in types of apartments; reductions in ceiling heights and sizes of apartments; higher numbers of single-aspect apartments; fewer stairs and lifts, fewer communal, community and cultural facilities; the re-introduction of co-living; and reduced sanitary facilities for student accommodation will, inevitably, have a negative impact on the nature and size of apartment projects in all locations across the country. The end result will, in my opinion, be negative impacts on physical and mental health.

SPPRs were first introduced in 2015 to replace the guidance contained in Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) by mandatory rules, which apply to every location in the state. Its wording is very clear that all planning authorities must comply with SPPRs:

*S.28.(1C) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), guidelines under that subsection may contain specific planning policy requirements with which planning authorities, regional assemblies and the Board shall, in the performance of their functions, comply.*

The SPPRs are not optional and have binding effects on all the consent authorities. When Section 25 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 comes into effect, these SPPRs will continue as National Planning Statements.

Therefore, they specifically apply to each individual location in the state that has a planning authority. While each planning authority development plan is required to be prepared under the SEA process, its provisions are overwritten by the mandatory compliance required by these SPPRs. This appears to undermine the development plan process.

Each of these SPPRs (mandatory under S.28.1.c) contained in these Design Standards clearly affect the nature of the apartment projects to which they will apply, reducing the previous standards, with a serious impact on the nature of the resultant apartment projects.

SPPRs 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8 (mandatory under S.28.1.c) have an impact on the sizes of apartments in a project, resulting in lesser space standards.

It is clear to me that the Specific Planning Policy Requirements (SPPRs) contained in the 2025 Guidelines establish a significant body of criteria and detailed rules that will impact of the nature, location and size of all the projects that must comply with those rules.

## Summary

It is my opinion that the criteria and detailed rules set out in the SPPRs of the Planning Design Standards for Apartments will lead to a reduction in quality of life for the inhabitants of the resultant lower standard apartments, with its consequent impact on health, wellbeing and the environment.



---

**Robin Mandal B.Arch., M.Arch.Sc, FRIAI**



## **Appendix 5**

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## **Update Note**

### **Review of Planning Standards for New Apartments**

#### **Introduction**

Proposals relating to the review of the for *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines* were discussed at previous Senior Officials Group meetings and the Cabinet Committee on Housing on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2025.

#### **Proposed Amendments**

In order to address design cost and flexibility to assist in making apartment development more viable, it is proposed to issue updated national planning standards for apartment development under s28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

The revised standards include proposals in relation to apartment mix and size, without changing the basic 1, 2 or 3 bedroom unit minimum floor areas already set out. They also address design standards such as the number of apartments per lift and stair core per floor, the proportion of dual aspect units and the provision of private amenity space in certain circumstances.

Further to engagement with DFHERIS, proposals to introduce clear policies for purpose-built student accommodation are also included.

---

## Next Steps

- The draft revised Guidelines have been screened out for Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) by the DHLGH expert advisory unit, which operates independently of the planning team that prepared the draft revised Guidelines.
- The DHLGH SEA screening must be confirmed by the four 'Environmental Authorities' (DAFM, DECC, EPA and NPWS), who have up to 4 weeks to respond to the DHLGH assessment.
- There is sufficient confidence in the AA and SEA screening process outcome to enable a Memo to be brought to Government, subject to confirmation by the environmental authorities.
- It is proposed that a Memo be brought next week i.e. 17<sup>th</sup> June, while the screening consultation process is ongoing.
- This would enable the proposals to be socialised and subject to any final tweaks, for finalised Guidelines to issue during early July 2025, to be immediately applicable in the planning system.
- Potential mechanisms to enable current planning permissions to avail of the revised Guidelines, when published, are being examined.

---

## **Briefing Note**

### **Review of Planning Standards for New Apartments**

#### **Introduction**

Proposals relating to the review of the for *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines* were discussed at previous Senior Officials Group meetings and the Cabinet Committee on Housing on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2025.

#### **Proposed Amendments**

##### **1) Apartment Mix**

With the exception of social and 'Part V' social/affordable housing, it is proposed to set a national standard that removes any restrictions on apartment typology mix and removes scope for locally imposed standards (currently max. 50% 1-bed and max. 25% studio nationally and locally imposed min 3-bed standards).

##### **2) Apartment Sizes**

It is not proposed to change the basic 1, 2 or 3 bedroom unit minimum sizes already set out. It is proposed to:-

- introduce the possibility of a smaller, 32m<sup>2</sup> studio apartment (currently 37m<sup>2</sup>);
- remove any restriction on the proportion of 2-bed 3 person units (currently max. 10%);

- 
- introduce the option to provide a 3-bed 4-person apartment at 76m<sup>2</sup> as per the *Design Manual for Quality Housing* published by DHLGH in 2023 (currently only 3-bed 5-person unit at 90m<sup>2</sup>);
  - require at least 25% of the apartments to exceed the basic floor area standards by a minimum of 10% - this is necessary to achieve a Universal Design (UD) accessibility standard (currently at least 50% must exceed by 10%);
  - Enable some storage to be provided outside the unit and remove aggregate floor areas which limit design flexibility.

### **3) Lift/Stair Cores and Dual aspect ratios**

It is proposed to remove any limitation on the number of units per lift and stair core per floor, subject to compliance with Building Regulations (currently max. 12). This will allow more units per core in conjunction with the more flexible dwelling mix and floor area changes.

It is also proposed to introduce a single standard that requires at least 25% of all units in a development to be dual aspect. (Currently min. 50% in suburban and min. 33% in urban locations).

### **4) Private Open Space**

It is proposed to enable planning authorities may accept a reduced provision of balconies in certain circumstances where their value would be negligible, such as:

- 
- Fronting sources of noise and air pollution, such as busy roads;
  - On taller building exposed to high wind conditions;
  - or, where high quality, usable communal open space can be provided in the scheme.

The proportion of such units should not exceed 50% (currently 100%).

### **5) Car Parking**

No changes proposed, but it is necessary to reinforce the policy position relating to an overall reduction in car parking for apartment schemes, which is permissible in urban areas.

### **6) Additional Requirements**

It is proposed to preclude local authorities from having imposing additional requirements, such as 5% extra floorspace for cultural and communal activity.

### **7) Purpose Built Student Accommodation:**

Further to engagement with DFHERIS, it is proposed to introduce clear policies for purpose-built student accommodation, including no requirement for the provision of individual en-suite bathroom facilities and flexibility in relation to aggregate space standards for kitchen/dining facilities.

---

## Next Steps

- The draft revised Guidelines have been screened out for Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) by the DHLGH expert advisory unit, which operates independently of the planning team that prepared the draft revised Guidelines.
- The DHLGH SEA screening must be confirmed by the four 'Environmental Authorities' (DAFM, DECC, EPA and NPWS), who have up to 4 weeks to respond to the DHLGH assessment.
- There is sufficient confidence in the AA and SEA screening process outcome to enable a Memo to be brought to Government, subject to confirmation by the environmental authorities.
- It is proposed that a Memo be brought next week i.e. 17<sup>th</sup> June, while the screening consultation process is ongoing.
- This would enable the proposals to be socialised and subject to any final tweaks, for finalised Guidelines to issue during early July 2025, to be immediately applicable in the planning system.
- Potential mechanisms to enable current planning permissions to avail of the revised Guidelines, when published, are being examined.

**From:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [James Browne \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#); [Lisa Clifford \(Housing\)](#); [Siona Cahill \(Housing\)](#); [John McDonald \(Housing\)](#); [Siobhan NicThighearnain \(Housing\)](#); [Jack Savage \(Housing\)](#); [Graham Doyle \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Apartment Standards  
**Date:** Monday 9 June 2025 18:02:00  
**Attachments:** [2 page Apartment Standards Update for Leaders 090625.docx](#)  
[4 page Apartment Standards Briefing for Leaders 090625.docx](#)  
[Final Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines 2025.docx](#)

---

Minister,  
Please now find attached the Final Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines, together with updated 2 and 4 page notes.  
Regards,  
Paul

---

**From:** Paul Hogan (Housing)  
**Sent:** Monday 9 June 2025 16:11  
**To:** James Browne (Housing) <James.Browne@housing.gov.ie>  
**Cc:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie>; Lisa Clifford (Housing) <Lisa.Clifford@housing.gov.ie>; Siona Cahill (Housing) <Siona.Cahill@housing.gov.ie>; John McDonald (Housing) <John.McDonald@housing.gov.ie>; Siobhan NicThighearnain (Housing) <Siobhan.NicThighearnain@housing.gov.ie>; Jack Savage (Housing) <Jack.Savage@housing.gov.ie>; Graham Doyle (Housing) <Graham.Doyle@housing.gov.ie>  
**Subject:** Apartment Standards Briefing

Minister,  
As discussed, please find a 2 page update note and a longer 4 page briefing note re. revised apartment standards - the main difference is that the latter includes detail of the revised proposals and the former is more general. I will separately fwd a full version.  
Regards  
Paul

---

**Paul Hogan**  
Assistant Secretary, Head of Planning Division

---

**An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**  
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

**Teach an Chustaim, Baile Átha Cliath 1, D01 W6X0**  
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[www.housing.gov.ie](http://www.housing.gov.ie)

**Designated Public Official Under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015**

**From:** [Maryann Harris \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Lisa Clifford \(Housing\)](#); [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#); [Jason Taylor \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Apartment Guidelines  
**Date:** Monday 9 June 2025 15:02:25

---

Thanks Paul, am reviewing that now and will come back asap.

Regards  
Maryann

---

**From:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie>  
**Sent:** Monday 9 June 2025 14:51  
**To:** Maryann Harris (Housing) <Maryann.Harris@housing.gov.ie>  
**Cc:** Lisa Clifford (Housing) <Lisa.Clifford@housing.gov.ie>; Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie>; Jason Taylor (Housing) <Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie>  
**Subject:** FW: Apartment Guidelines

Hi Maryann,

I'm sending this directly in the interests of time – it's our final version with TCs for SEA screening that I've cleared and have asked Claragh and Jason to tidy up as a 'clean' version for you, but I understand that you may also have some final suggested tweaks. I wish to send a finalised copy to the Minister asap this afternoon.

Regards,  
Paul

---

**From:** Paul Hogan (Housing)  
**Sent:** Monday 9 June 2025 14:42  
**To:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <[Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie)>; Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** RE: Apartment Guidelines

Claragh, Jason,

I have reviewed the attached and it is cleared by me for SEA screening subject to the TCs being accepted and notes/comments deleted.

Can a clean be version be produced and checked and sent to Lisa and Maryann asap this afternoon.

No problem if it also helpful to also provide a TC version to Lisa and Maryann.

Thanks,  
Paul

---

**From:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <[Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Monday 9 June 2025 14:21  
**To:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <[Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie)>; Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** RE: Apartment Guidelines

Attached!

---

**From:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <[Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Monday 9 June 2025 14:16  
**To:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Cc:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <[Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** RE: Apartment Guidelines

Hi Jason,  
You may not have attached the document!  
Thanks  
Pau;

---

**From:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Monday 9 June 2025 13:34  
**To:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <[Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** Apartment Guidelines

Hi Paul,

As discussed with Claragh attached it the latest version of the Apartment Guidelines.

Jason

---

**Jason Taylor**  
Planning Adviser – National, Regional and Urban Planning

---

**An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**  
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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**To:** [Maryann Harris \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Lisa Clifford \(Housing\)](#); [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#); [Jason Taylor \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Apartment Guidelines  
**Date:** Monday 9 June 2025 14:51:00  
**Attachments:** [Draft Apartments Guidelines 2025 \(090625\) Final TCs.docx](#)

---

Hi Maryann,

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Regards,  
Paul

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**Subject:** RE: Apartment Guidelines

Attached!

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**Subject:** RE: Apartment Guidelines

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Pau;

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**Sent:** Monday 9 June 2025 13:34

**To:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <[Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie)>

**Subject:** Apartment Guidelines

Hi Paul,

As discussed with Claragh attached it the latest version of the Apartment Guidelines.

Jason

---

**Jason Taylor**

Planning Adviser – National, Regional and Urban Planning

---

**An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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[www.housing.gov.ie](http://www.housing.gov.ie)

**From:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [Lemass, Paul](#)  
**Cc:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#); [Jason Taylor \(Housing\)](#); [Colin Ryan \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL  
**Date:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 13:27:34

---

Paul

As discussed earlier today, below is the text we have included in the draft s28:

## 5.2 Purpose-Built Student Accommodation

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science **has published** “The *Design Guide for State Sponsored Student Accommodation 2025*” to inform the approach to Student Accommodation. The Guide is an iterative framework that reflects best practices and supports the efficient delivery of state sponsored student accommodation. It is also intended, where appropriate, that the standards contained within the Guide can inform the planning and design of off-campus forms of student accommodation that are led by the private sector.

The 2025 Guide supersedes the 1999 *Department of Education Guidelines* which were issued under Section 50 of the Finance Act 1999 and takes a bottom-up approach to defining minimum space standards for study bedrooms, bathrooms, and shared kitchen, living, and dining areas. Its objective is to establish updated design standards that support the delivery of high-quality student accommodation by promoting consistency in design, improving cost-efficiency, and enabling the adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

While adherence to the Design Guide is not a mandatory policy requirement specific standards set out in the Design Guide are identified as being of particular importance from the perspective of providing appropriate flexibility for these typologies to be applied within the planning system.

Specifically, the Design Guide allows for the provision of single study bedrooms without the requirement for an en-suite bathroom, with a minimum required area of 8 sq.m for a single study bedroom and a minimum required area of 11.5 sq.m for a study bedroom incorporating an en-suite bathroom.

Accordingly, the following is a requirement of these Guidelines:

### **Specific Planning Policy Requirement 8**

- (A) (i) **There shall be no requirement or restriction in relation to the provision of en-suite bathrooms for single study bedrooms within Purpose Built Student Accommodation schemes.**
  
- (ii) **The minimum required area for a single study bedroom**

**without en-suite facilities is 8 sq.m and the minimum required area for a single study bedroom with en-suite facilities is 11.5 sq.m; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR.**

**(iii) The minimum space requirements for kitchen/dining/living areas serving 10 and 12 persons are 3.6 m<sup>2</sup> and 3.3 m<sup>2</sup> per person, respectively; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR.**

**(B) Where any other requirement or restriction is set out within a statutory plan, this Specific Planning Policy Requirement shall apply to any single student accommodation scheme.**

In light of our discussion I propose to amend the highlighted yellow text above to say 'is developing', and as we discussed, we will keep in touch in relation to publication etc over the next few days.

If there are any other issues with the text you might let me know,  
Kind regards  
Claragh

-----  
**Claragh Mulhern**  
Principal Adviser

National Strategic Planning, Planning Division

—  
**An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**  
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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[www.tithiocht.gov.ie](http://www.tithiocht.gov.ie)  
[www.housing.gov.ie](http://www.housing.gov.ie)  
—

**From:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#); [Lemass, Paul](#)  
**Cc:** [Jason Taylor \(Housing\)](#); [Colin Ryan \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL  
**Date:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 13:37:00

---

No problem, can you amend the 'Final' version, as I had picked up some spellings, commas and typos.

Thanks

Paul

---

**From:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie>  
**Sent:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 13:28  
**To:** Lemass, Paul <Paul\_Lemass@dfheris.gov.ie>  
**Cc:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie>; Jason Taylor (Housing) <Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie>; Colin Ryan (Housing) <Colin.Ryan@housing.gov.ie>  
**Subject:** Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL

Paul

As discussed earlier today, below is the text we have included in the draft s28:

## 5.2 Purpose-Built Student Accommodation

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science **has published** "The *Design Guide for State Sponsored Student Accommodation 2025*" to inform the approach to Student Accommodation. The Guide is an iterative framework that reflects best practices and supports the efficient delivery of state sponsored student accommodation. It is also intended, where appropriate, that the standards contained within the Guide can inform the planning and design of off-campus forms of student accommodation that are led by the private sector.

The 2025 Guide supersedes the 1999 *Department of Education Guidelines* which were issued under Section 50 of the Finance Act 1999 and takes a bottom-up approach to defining minimum space standards for study bedrooms, bathrooms, and shared kitchen, living, and dining areas. Its objective is to establish updated design standards that support the delivery of high-quality student accommodation by promoting consistency in design, improving cost-efficiency, and enabling the adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

While adherence to the Design Guide is not a mandatory policy requirement specific standards set out in the Design Guide are identified as being of particular importance from the perspective of providing appropriate flexibility for these typologies to be applied within the planning system.

Specifically, the Design Guide allows for the provision of single study bedrooms without the requirement for an en-suite bathroom, with a minimum required area of 8 sq.m for a single study bedroom and a minimum required area of 11.5 sq.m for a study bedroom incorporating an en-suite bathroom.

Accordingly, the following is a requirement of these Guidelines:

**Specific Planning Policy Requirement 8**

- (A) (i) **There shall be no requirement or restriction in relation to the provision of en-suite bathrooms for single study bedrooms within Purpose Built Student Accommodation schemes.**
- (ii) **The minimum required area for a single study bedroom without en-suite facilities is 8 sq.m and the minimum required area for a single study bedroom with en-suite facilities is 11.5 sq.m; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR.**
- (iii) **The minimum space requirements for kitchen/dining/living areas serving 10 and 12 persons are 3.6 m<sup>2</sup> and 3.3 m<sup>2</sup> per person, respectively; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR.**
- (B) **Where any other requirement or restriction is set out within a statutory plan, this Specific Planning Policy Requirement shall apply to any single student accommodation scheme.**

In light of our discussion I propose to amend the highlighted yellow text above to say 'is developing', and as we discussed, we will keep in touch in relation to publication etc over the next few days.

If there are any other issues with the text you might let me know,

Kind regards

Claragh

-----  
**Claragh Mulhern**  
Principal Adviser

National Strategic Planning, Planning Division

-----  
**An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**  
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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---

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[www.tithiocht.gov.ie](http://www.tithiocht.gov.ie)  
[www.housing.gov.ie](http://www.housing.gov.ie)

---

**From:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Jason Taylor \(Housing\)](#); [Colin Ryan \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL  
**Date:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 13:40:00

---

Yes, that's all fine!

---

**From:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <[Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 13:39  
**To:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <[Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Cc:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>; Colin Ryan (Housing) <[Colin.Ryan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Colin.Ryan@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** RE: Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL

Paul

That mail was to Paul Lemass (sorry for confusion!), but just to note, I used the version that you sent to the Minister, assuming that covers your request below?

Kind regards  
Claragh

---

**From:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <[Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 13:38  
**To:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <[Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie)>; Lemass, Paul <[Paul\\_Lemass@dfheris.gov.ie](mailto:Paul_Lemass@dfheris.gov.ie)>  
**Cc:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>; Colin Ryan (Housing) <[Colin.Ryan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Colin.Ryan@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** RE: Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL

No problem, can you amend the 'Final' version, as I had picked up some spellings, commas and typos.  
Thanks  
Paul

---

**From:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <[Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 13:28  
**To:** Lemass, Paul <[Paul\\_Lemass@dfheris.gov.ie](mailto:Paul_Lemass@dfheris.gov.ie)>  
**Cc:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <[Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie)>; Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>; Colin Ryan (Housing) <[Colin.Ryan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Colin.Ryan@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL

Paul

As discussed earlier today, below is the text we have included in the draft s28:

## 5.2 Purpose-Built Student Accommodation

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science **has published** “The *Design Guide for State Sponsored Student Accommodation 2025*” to inform the approach to Student Accommodation. The Guide is an iterative framework that reflects best practices and supports the efficient delivery of state sponsored student accommodation. It is also intended, where appropriate, that the standards contained within the Guide can inform the planning and design of off-campus forms of student accommodation that are led by the private sector.

The 2025 Guide supersedes the 1999 *Department of Education Guidelines* which were issued under Section 50 of the Finance Act 1999 and takes a bottom-up approach to defining minimum space standards for study bedrooms, bathrooms, and shared kitchen, living, and dining areas. Its objective is to establish updated design standards that support the delivery of high-quality student accommodation by promoting consistency in design, improving cost-efficiency, and enabling the adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

While adherence to the Design Guide is not a mandatory policy requirement specific standards set out in the Design Guide are identified as being of particular importance from the perspective of providing appropriate flexibility for these typologies to be applied within the planning system.

Specifically, the Design Guide allows for the provision of single study bedrooms without the requirement for an en-suite bathroom, with a minimum required area of 8 sq.m for a single study bedroom and a minimum required area of 11.5 sq.m for a study bedroom incorporating an en-suite bathroom.

Accordingly, the following is a requirement of these Guidelines:

#### **Specific Planning Policy Requirement 8**

- (A) (i) There shall be no requirement or restriction in relation to the provision of en-suite bathrooms for single study bedrooms within Purpose Built Student Accommodation schemes.**
- (ii) The minimum required area for a single study bedroom without en-suite facilities is 8 sq.m and the minimum required area for a single study bedroom with en-suite facilities is 11.5 sq.m; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR.**
- (iii) The minimum space requirements for kitchen/dining/living areas serving 10 and 12 persons are 3.6 m<sup>2</sup> and 3.3 m<sup>2</sup> per person, respectively; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that**

**exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR.**

**(B) Where any other requirement or restriction is set out within a statutory plan, this Specific Planning Policy Requirement shall apply to any single student accommodation scheme.**

In light of our discussion I propose to amend the highlighted yellow text above to say 'is developing', and as we discussed, we will keep in touch in relation to publication etc over the next few days.

If there are any other issues with the text you might let me know,  
Kind regards  
Claragh

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**Claragh Mulhern**  
Principal Adviser

National Strategic Planning, Planning Division

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**An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**  
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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**From:** [Lemass, Paul](#)  
**To:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#); [Jason Taylor \(Housing\)](#); [Colin Ryan \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL  
**Date:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 14:39:42

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Thanks Claragh,

Fine with the proposed change highlighted in yellow below

Rgds

Paul

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**From:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie>  
**Sent:** Tuesday 10 June 2025 1:27 pm  
**To:** Lemass, Paul <Paul\_Lemass@dfheris.gov.ie>  
**Cc:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie>; Jason Taylor (Housing) <Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie>; Colin Ryan (Housing) <Colin.Ryan@housing.gov.ie>  
**Subject:** Draft text - CONFIDENTIAL

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Paul

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standards set out in the Design Guide are identified as being of particular importance from the perspective of providing appropriate flexibility for these typologies to be applied within the planning system.

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  - (iii) The minimum space requirements for kitchen/dining/living areas serving 10 and 12 persons are 3.6 m<sup>2</sup> and 3.3 m<sup>2</sup> per person, respectively; and statutory plans may not set out minimum required areas that exceed the minimum required areas set out within this SPPR.**
- (B) Where any other requirement or restriction is set out within a statutory plan, this Specific Planning Policy Requirement shall apply to any single student accommodation scheme.**

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Claragh

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**Claragh Mulhern**  
Principal Adviser

National Strategic Planning, Planning Division

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**From:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** FW: draft apartment guidelines  
**Date:** Friday 13 June 2025 15:00:15  
**Attachments:** [CEPP 12062025 Env Assessment for draft Apt Guidelines 11062025.pdf](#)  
[Final Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines 2025 11 June NSP.docx](#)  
[image001.jpg](#)  
[image002.jpg](#)

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**From:** Maryann Harris (Housing) <Maryann.Harris@housing.gov.ie>  
**Sent:** Thursday 12 June 2025 20:16  
**To:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie>  
**Cc:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie>; Lisa Clifford (Housing) <Lisa.Clifford@housing.gov.ie>  
**Subject:** RE: draft apartment guidelines

Dear Jason,

I have reviewed the draft Apartment Guidelines of 4 June 2025 and the subsequent final revision of 11 June 2025. Please find attached my report based on the draft you have provided to me of 11 June 2025, my experience and my knowledge of other existing Departmental guidelines.

Following a detailed review, in my opinion, the Habitats Directive and the SEA Directive do not apply to the draft Guidelines, for reasons which I have outlined in my report. Please note that any references to case law or Commission guidance on case law are made in terms of informing a scientific assessment of the draft Guidelines and do not constitute legal advice.

Kind regards,  
Maryann

**Dr Maryann Harris** BSLA MSc Dip. Law PhD MILI ASLA  
Environmental Planning Manager

**Aonad Beartais Pleanála Aeráide agus Comhshaoil, Rannán Pleanála**  
Climate and Environmental Planning Policy Unit, Planning Division

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**From:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday 4 June 2025 17:25  
**To:** Maryann Harris (Housing) <[Maryann.Harris@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Maryann.Harris@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** draft apartment guidelines

Hi Maryann

As discussed the draft apartment guidelines are attached. Let me know when will have the chance to review and we can arrange a follow up meeting.

Jason

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**Jason Taylor**

Planning Adviser – National, Regional and Urban Planning

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CEPP/2025/ENV/002

12 June 2025

**RE: Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments - Guidelines for Planning Authorities issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) (dated 11 June 2025)**

On 4 June 2025, the Strategic National Planning Unit requested the CEPP Unit to advise on the requirements for environmental assessment under the Habitats and SEA Directives for the Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments - Guidelines for Planning Authorities, final draft dated 11 June 2025 (attached Item 1), hereafter referred to as “the draft Guidelines”, and if screening is required for environmental assessment. The draft Guidelines are being issued by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and constitute Ministerial Guidelines.

The purpose of the draft Guidelines is to set out policy and guidance in relation to standards for housing developments that include apartments. For the purpose of these draft Guidelines, an apartment may be defined as “a self-contained residential unit in a multi-unit building with grouped or common access”<sup>1</sup>. The draft Guidelines apply to all housing developments that include apartments that may be made available for sale, whether for owner occupation or for individual lease, or for rental purposes, through both public and private schemes. The draft Guidelines do not apply to apartments within the category of development of holiday villages.

The overall purpose of the draft Guidelines is stated as “to strike an effective regulatory balance; ensuring that apartment development meets the needs of society in terms of standards and quality, while promoting an increased level of output overall” under the National Policy Objectives of the National Planning Framework (NPF) (DHLGH 2025), which was prepared through the processes of environmental assessment (AA, SEA and SFRA). The draft Guidelines are also prepared within the national legislative context of

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<sup>1</sup> Draft Guidelines, p. 6.



the Planning Development Act 2024. Throughout the draft Guidelines, it is stated that they are to be applied in coordination with other Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, including:

- i. the *Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines* (2024) (pp. 5-6);
- ii. the *Guidance on the Preparation of a Housing Need and Demand Assessment* (2021) (pp. 12-13, 25);
- iii. the *Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2018) (p. 24);
- iv. the *Development Plans - Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2022) (p. 24).

In addition, the draft Guidelines refer to other national legislation which forms the basis for apartment developments and their operation:

- i. the Building Regulations 1997 (S.I. 496 of 1997), as amended;
- ii. the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 (MUD Act).

The application of the draft Guidelines is to apartment projects for which the principle of development has been established through previous stages of the planning-making process and for which the framework for consents have already been determined under plans which have been subject to environmental assessments. This is stated in the draft Guidelines<sup>2</sup> as follows:

“With respect to apartment type residential development, the application of the policies, objectives and requirements of the SRDCSGs through the adoption by local authorities of statutory plans<sup>3</sup> made under the Planning and Development Acts 2000 and 2024 will determine suitable locations for the delivery of apartments and other considerations, including their associated parking requirements. Such plans are required to be prepared through the SEA process under S.I. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011.

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<sup>2</sup> Draft Guidelines, pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Draft Guidelines, p. 5: “Any reference to a statutory plan(s) in these Guidelines refers to all development plans, local area plans or SDZ planning schemes made under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), or any development plan, urban area plan, priority area plans, coordinated urban area plans or SDZ or UDZ planning schemes made under the Planning and Development Act 2024”.



Matters relating to density and other factors that further inform the principle of undertaking apartment development at an individual site are set out in the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024).

These Guidelines set out, for consistent application by all planning authorities and An Coimisiún Pleanála, the particular design parameters that apply to apartment development, where the principle of the development of apartments at any particular site has already been established in accordance with the statutory plan and consideration of the policies, objectives and requirements of the SRDCSGs. Any individual project where apartments are proposed for development may also require to be assessed under the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended). Policies contained in these Guidelines include matters relating to:

- Apartment mix; Internal space standards for different types of apartments; Dual aspect ratios;
- Floor to ceiling heights;
- Apartments to stair/lift core ratios;
- Storage spaces; and
- Amenity spaces including balconies/patios.”

The draft Guidelines are to be applied by all planning authorities. Planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála (or An Coimisiún Pleanála upon commencement of part 17 of the Planning and Development Act 2024) are required to have regard to the draft Guidelines and are also required to comply with any specific planning policy requirements (SPPRs) of the draft Guidelines, within the meaning of Section 28 (1C) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) in carrying out their functions under the Act. Accordingly, where SPPRs are stated in this document, they take precedence over any conflicting, policies and objectives of statutory plans<sup>4</sup>. Where such conflicts arise, such

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<sup>4</sup> Any reference to a statutory plan(s) in these Guidelines refers to all development plans, local area plans or SDZ planning schemes made under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), or any development plan, urban area plan, priority area plans, coordinated urban area plans or SDZ or UDZ planning schemes made under the Planning and Development Act 2024.



plans should be amended by the relevant planning authority to reflect the content of these guidelines.

The draft Guidelines include eight SPPRs which may be summarised as follows:

**SPPR 1:** Limits planning authorities from creating local rules or criteria within statutory plans in relation to the mix of unit sizes or types to be provided within apartment developments, but planning authorities retain powers to determine this for certain categories of apartments (social housing developments, social/affordable housing provided for under Part V the Act or schemes to provide housing for older persons where a specific mix of unit sizes may be required). Further states that there shall be no minimum or maximum requirements set by planning authorities for apartments with a certain number of bedrooms.

**SPPR 2:** Defines the minimum apartment floor areas (excluding student accommodation) by type of unit (based on number of bedrooms) to be applied nationally to all statutory plans.

**SPPR 3:** Defines the minimum number (by percentage of overall units) of dual aspect apartments to be provided within a project to be applied nationally to all statutory plans, but planning authorities are given powers to determine this for certain categories of apartments (building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25 ha).

**SPPR 4:** Defines the minimum floor to ceiling height of ground level apartments to be applied nationally to all statutory plans, but planning authorities are given the power to determine this for certain categories of apartment (building refurbishment schemes on sites of any size or urban infill schemes on sites of up to 0.25 ha).

**SPPR 5:** State that there can be no criteria either in statutory plans or for individual projects for the minimum number of units per floor per core. It defers to the Building Regulations on this issue as a matter of compliance. It notes that “The number of lift and stair cores is principally governed by the dual aspect ratios” and the financial implications of maintenance and the need to ensure health and safety as key factors in decisions concerning this aspect of apartment design.

**SPPR 6:** States that the provision of new Communal, Community and Cultural facilities within apartment projects shall only be required in specific locations which are identified



through the local authority development plan with reference to the Development Plan - Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022)<sup>5</sup> and shall not be required on a blanket threshold-based approach in individual apartment schemes. Therefore, the development plan process is the mechanism for decision-making on the location and provision of such facilities and not the project level. As the development plan is required to be prepared through the SEA process under S.I. 436 of 2004 (as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011), this will ensure a framework for consent through a plan-led approach at the county level.

**SPPR 7:** There shall be a presumption against granting planning permission for shared accommodation/co-living development unless the proposed development is required to meet specific demand which is to be identified by a planning authority through a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) process, under the Guidance on the Preparation of a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (2021) (p. 25). The HNDA process is used to prepare the Housing Strategy Statement by each local authority and this in turn is incorporated into its development plan. As the development plan is required to be prepared through the SEA process under S.I. 436 of 2004 (as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011), this will ensure a framework for consent through a plan-led approach at the county level, not the project level.

**SPPR 8:** States that en-suite bathrooms for single study bedrooms for the apartment category of purpose-built student accommodations are not to be required. Defines internal standards within this category of apartments to be applied nationally to all statutory plans for minimum floor areas for: single study bedroom units and for kitchen/dining/living areas serving 10 and 12 persons.

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<sup>5</sup> Section 10(2)(d) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires that a development plan shall include objectives for “the integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population.” The *Development Plans - Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2022) state that the development plan should provide an evidence-based approach to the determination of requirements for new social, community and cultural facilities that will be required on foot of new development in an area (see Section 7.3). Those Guidelines provide examples of what type of uses and/or facilities may be considered as social, community and cultural facilities.



### **Applicability of EU Habitats Directive in the context of Article 6(3) (Appropriate Assessment)**

A plan for the purposes of Appropriate Assessment is defined in Regulation 2(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. 477) as:

*“plan’, subject to the exclusion, except where the contrary intention appears, of any plan that is a land use plan within the meaning of the Planning Acts 2000 to 2011, includes –*

- (a) any plan, programme or scheme, statutory or non-statutory, that establishes public policy in relation to land use and infrastructural development in one or more specified locations or regions, including any development of land or on land, the extraction or exploitation of mineral resources or of renewable energy resources and the carrying out of land use activities, that is to be considered for the adoption or authorisation or approval or for the grant of a licence, consent, permission, permit, derogation or other authorisation by a public authority, or*
- (b) a proposal to amend or extend a plan or scheme referred to in subparagraph (a).”*

The draft Guidelines cannot be linked to clear and tangible effects on the environment nor any specific Natura 2000 site(s). They are not allocating resources to, and are not directing the locations of, apartment development in one or more specified locations or regions.

Therefore, the draft Guidelines may be considered to be outside of the definition of a plan for the purposes of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive, and Article 6(3) may be considered as not applicable to these draft Guidelines. The process of Appropriate Assessment is still applicable at the plan level for any proposed zoning/changes to zoning of lands for any statutory plans, including local authority development plans and/or variations of them, in accordance with Part XAB of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. 477). The process of Appropriate Assessment may still be applicable at the project level for any proposed apartment development.



### **Applicability of SEA Directive**

The draft Guidelines may be defined as a plan or programme in line with Article 2(a) of the SEA Directive, as they are subject to preparation by a national authority (DHLGH) under legislative provisions (Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended)). They align with national policy in *Housing for All*, the National Planning Framework (NPF) (DHLGH 2025), other Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines – the *Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines* (SRDCSGs) (DHLGH 2024) and the *Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DHLGH 2018), and the national legislative context of the Planning Development Act 2024.

The scope of the SEA Directive is determined based upon Article 3. As stated in Article 3(1), a plan or programme shall be subject to SEA if it meets the characteristics of Articles 3(2), 3(3) or 3(4). A plan which meets Article 3(2) is subject to mandatory SEA, while a plan that meets Article 3(3) or 3(4) requires screening for SEA to determine if further stages of environmental assessment would be required. As the draft Guidelines are not a modification of an existing plan or programme that was previously subject to the mandatory SEA process under Article 3(2), Article 3(3) does not apply to them.

Article 3(2) states that:

*“Subject to paragraph 3, an environmental assessment shall be carried out for all plans and programmes,*

*(a) which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 85/337/EEC, or*

*(b) which, in view of the likely effect on sites, have been determined to require an assessment pursuant to Article 6 or 7 of Directive 92/43/EEC”.*

Therefore, the SEA Directive must apply if a plan or programme is prepared for one or more of the stated sectors *and* if it sets the framework for future development consent of projects which are listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive (85/337/EEC) *or* if the plan or programme requires an Appropriate Assessment (AA) under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).



It is clear that the draft Guidelines are concerning the sectors of “land use” and “town and country planning” under Article 3(2)(a). Therefore, Article 3(4) is not applicable.

The purpose of the draft Guidelines is to promote residential development of apartment schemes and they “apply to all housing or mixed-use developments that include apartments that may be made available for sale, whether for owner occupation or for individual lease, or for rental purposes<sup>6</sup>”. Given this, they may potentially include projects listed under Annex II 10(b) to Directive 85/337/EEC (“Urban Development Projects”). Under the Planning and Development Regulations (2001), Section 10 of Part 2 in Schedule 5 lists the mandatory thresholds for EIA which may be applicable to certain apartment projects, including:

*“10. Infrastructure*

*(b) (i) Construction of more than 500 dwelling units.*

*(iv) Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere.”*

In addition, Section 13 of Part 2 in Schedule 5 may also be applicable to apartment projects, particularly mixed-use developments or extensions to existing apartment developments:

*“13. Changes, extensions, development and testing*

*(a) Any change or extension of development which would:-*

*(i) result in the development being of a class listed in Part 1 or paragraphs 1 to 12 of Part 2 of this Schedule, and*

*(ii) result in an increase in size greater than-*

*- 25 per cent, or*

*- an amount equal to 50 per cent of the appropriate threshold, whichever is the greater.”*

Section 1.2 of the draft Guidelines states that “Any individual project where apartments are proposed for development may also require to be assessed under the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (Directive 2011/92/EU as amended)”. Sub-threshold projects in Schedule 5 Part 2 require screening for EIA, except in cases where the

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<sup>6</sup> Draft Guidelines, p. 6.



likelihood of significant effects can be readily excluded. The *Guidelines for Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanála on carrying out Environmental Impact Assessment* (August 2018) remain applicable.

The Commission's guidance on case law on environmental assessment of plans, programmes and projects<sup>7</sup> has stated:

*“Therefore, as was noted by the Advocate General in points 25 and 26 of her Opinion, the concept of ‘a significant body of criteria and detailed rules’ must be construed qualitatively and not quantitatively” (judgment of 27 October 2016, D’Oultremont and Others, C-290/15, EU:C:2016:816). “In that connection [normative acts], the Court has ruled that the notion of ‘plans and programmes’ relates to any measure which establishes, by defining rules and procedures, a significant body of criteria and detailed rules for the grant and implementation of one or more projects likely to have significant effects on the environment (judgments of 27 October 2016, D’Oultremont and Others, C-290/15, EU:C:2016:816, paragraph 49 and the case-law cited, and of 8 May 2019, “Verdi Ambiente e Società (VAS) — Aps Onlus” and Others, C-305/18, EU:C:2019:384, paragraph 50 and the case-law cited).”*

In its judgment of 22 February 2022 in Case C-300/20, *Bund Naturschutz in Bayern eV v Landkreis Rosenheim*, the CJEU confirmed its previous interpretation of the concept of “framework for future consent”, as follows:

*“62. The requirement laid down in Article 3(2)(a) of Directive 2001/42, according to which the plan or programme concerned must set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 2011/92, must therefore be regarded as met where that plan or programme establishes a significant body of criteria and detailed rules for the grant and implementation of one or more of those projects, inter alia with regard to the **location, nature, size and operating conditions of such projects, or the allocation of resources connected with those projects.***

*63. By contrast, that requirement is not met in the case of a plan or programme which, while targeting projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 2011/92, does not lay down such criteria or detailed rules<sup>8</sup>.”*

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<sup>7</sup> EC (2020) *Environmental Assessment of Plans, Programmes and Projects – Rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union*. pp. 151-152

<sup>8</sup> CJEU (2022) *Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 22 February 2022. Bund Naturschutz in Bayern eV v Landkreis Rosenheim*. Case C-300/20. Para. 62-63.



This is settled case law and was confirmed on 21 March 2024 by the CJEU in the Opinion of Advocate General Kokott<sup>9</sup> in *Friends of the Irish Environment CLG v Government of Ireland and Ors*.

The CJEU has held that “provisions of purely indicative value”<sup>10</sup> cannot constitute a “framework for future development consent”. Irish case law<sup>11</sup> has established that the text of Section 28 guidelines are generally of indicative value and cannot be considered to set a framework for development consent as they are not mandatory for consent authorities, but that specific planning policy requirements (SPPRs) are “mandatory criteria where consistency is required”<sup>12</sup>. In his decision, Humphreys, J. has stated that “SPPRs contained in s. 28 guidelines are mandatory, but otherwise the duty in respect of s. 28 guidelines is to have regard to them, not to comply with them”<sup>13</sup>.

The key issue in terms of the SEA Directive is whether or not the SPPRs within the draft Guidelines alone or in combination can be considered to set a framework for consent for future development of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 2011/92. Thus, it is necessary to examine each of the SPPRs within the draft Guidelines with reference to the CJEU’s judgement of 22 February 2022 in Case C-300/20 *Bund Naturschutz in Bayern eV v Landkreis Rosenheim* and to ascertain if their inclusion “establishes a significant body of criteria and detailed rules for the grant and implementation of one or more of those projects, *inter alia* with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions” for apartment projects in determining the applicability of the SEA Directive to the draft Guidelines. This consideration is limited to the SPPRs, as they are the only sections of the draft Guidelines which could be considered to have any possible binding effects on the consent authorities, not the content of the draft Guidelines more generally. These points are considered below:

- a) *Location* - There are no SPPRs concerning the location of apartment projects in the draft Guidelines. The draft Guidelines do not provide any national criteria or detailed rules for the location of apartment projects – that is an aspect that is required to be addressed by the planning authority in statutory plans such as the local authority development plan. There is no geographic specificity for the

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<sup>9</sup> CJEU (2024) Opinion of Advocate General Kokott delivered on 21 March 2024. Case C-727/22. *Friends of the Irish Environment CLG v Government of Ireland and Others* Para. 35.

<sup>10</sup> *A v Others*, §76; C-321/18 *Terre wallone*, (“*Terre wallone*”) Paras. 42, 44.

<sup>11</sup> *Cork County Council v. MHLGH and the Office of the Planning Regulator* [2021] IEHC 683.

<sup>12</sup> *Cork County Council v. MHLGH and the Office of the Planning Regulator* [2021] IEHC 683, Para. 88.

<sup>13</sup> *Cork County Council v. MHLGH and the Office of the Planning Regulator* [2021] IEHC 683., Para. 36.



draft Guidelines, as they are national in their application. Although the draft Guidelines note that, “In general terms, apartments are most appropriately located within urban areas”, they do not require this and allow for apartment projects to be planned for other locations (Section 2.3).

- b) *Nature* - There are no SPPRs concerning the nature of apartment projects in the draft Guidelines. The principle of apartment projects is already established prior to the application of the draft Guidelines, which state: “Matters relating to density and other factors that further inform the principle of undertaking apartment development at an individual site are set out in the *Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024)*<sup>14</sup>”. The zoning and land uses in relation to apartment projects are prescribed in the statutory plan, e.g., the local authority development plan, and the densities (which determine land take and number of units) and parameters for siting of apartment projects are determined under the SRDCSGs<sup>15</sup>.
- c) *Size* - There are no SPPRs concerning the size of an apartment project in the draft Guidelines. The size and scale of an apartment project is already addressed through both the local authority development plan (extent, area) and through existing Section 28 guidelines on densities for residential developments (the SRDCSGs) and building heights (the *Building Height Guidelines*). The SPPRs in the draft Guidelines only address the size of individual apartments with respect to their minimum internal dimensions – floor area (SPPR 2) and height of ground floor units (SPPR 4) and for single study bedroom units and for kitchen/dining/living areas serving 10 and 12 persons within purpose-built student accommodations (SPPR 8) – and only for certain categories of apartment projects. These do not constitute criteria for the size of projects. For other categories of apartment projects, there are no standards for internal dimensions and it is left at the discretion of the planning authority to decide this upon a case-by-case basis.
- d) *Operating conditions* - There are no SPPRs concerning the operating conditions of apartment projects in the draft Guidelines. The operating conditions for any apartment development at the project level would be determined by the relevant local authority on a case-by-case basis. The Minister is precluded under Section 34 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 from mandating any conditions that apply to a planning permission for any development, including apartments, as this is a prescribed function of the planning authorities. Under Section 30 of the Act, the Minister cannot comment on individual planning applications. Therefore, the draft Guidelines do not provide any standard planning conditions for general use on operating conditions. Furthermore, as stated in Section 6.3 of the draft Guidelines, the Multi-Unit Developments Act,

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<sup>14</sup> Draft Guidelines, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (SRDCSGs) (DHLGH 2024), particularly Chapter 3.0: Settlement, Place and Density, pp. 21-34.



2011 (MUD Act) already governs the general maintenance requirements for all apartment schemes nationally.

- e) *Allocation of resources* - There are no SPPRs concerning the allocation of resources for apartment projects in the draft Guidelines.

Therefore, the draft Guidelines cannot be considered to “set the framework for future consent for projects” based upon the definition provided through the decision of the CJEU in the Bund Naturschutz in Bayern eV v Landkreis Rosenheim case. As stated above, the Habitats Directive is not considered to be applicable to the draft Guidelines. On this basis, the SEA Directive is not applicable to the draft Guidelines, as there is no requirement to undertake the SEA process on a mandatory basis under either Article 3(2)(a) or Article 3(2)(b) and there is no requirement to carry out any SEA Screening process under Articles 3(3) or 3(4) for the draft Guidelines.

This is without prejudice to the application of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

Ends.

---

**Dr Maryann Harris**

Environmental Planning Manager

Attach: 1. Draft Guidelines for Apartments (June 2025) issued under Section 28 of the Planning Act

**From:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [Caroline Timmons \(Housing\)](#); [David Kelly \(Housing\)](#); [Paul Benson \(Housing\)](#); [Karen Kenny \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#); [Lisa Clifford \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** Revised apartment standards  
**Date:** Friday 13 June 2025 18:14:00  
**Attachments:** [Final Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines 2025 11 June NSP.docx](#)  
[3 page Apartment Standards Note 130625.docx](#)

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Hi All,

The draft revised apartment standards have been determined not to require AA or SEA screening further to environmental assessment and can now be published as intended further to a memo to Government on 24 June next. I attach the final draft together with a 3-page summary of the main changes, noting that while Claragh and Lisa's team have gotten them over the line and through the assessment process and will now be finalising, Karen did a lot of the heavy lifting at an earlier stage, including liaising on cost etc. So, thanks to all involved.

Regards,

Paul

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**Paul Hogan**

Assistant Secretary, Head of Planning Division

---

**An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**

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**Designated Public Official Under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015**

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## **Briefing Note**

### **Review of Planning Standards for New Apartments**

#### **Introduction**

Proposals relating to the review of the for *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines* were discussed at previous Senior Officials Group meetings and the Cabinet Committee on Housing on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2025.

#### **Proposed Amendments**

##### **1) Apartment Mix**

With the exception of social and 'Part V' social/affordable housing, it is proposed to set a national standard that removes any restrictions on apartment typology mix and removes scope for locally imposed standards (currently max. 50% 1-bed and max. 25% studio nationally and locally imposed min 3-bed standards).

##### **2) Apartment Sizes**

It is not proposed to change the basic 1, 2 or 3 bedroom unit minimum sizes already set out. It is proposed to:-

- introduce the possibility of a smaller, 32m<sup>2</sup> studio apartment (currently 37m<sup>2</sup>);
- remove any restriction on the proportion of 2-bed 3 person units (currently max. 10%);

- 
- introduce the option to provide a 3-bed 4-person apartment at 76m<sup>2</sup> as per the *Design Manual for Quality Housing* published by DHLGH in 2023 (currently only 3-bed 5-person unit at 90m<sup>2</sup>);
  - require at least 25% of the apartments to exceed the basic floor area standards by a minimum of 10% - this is necessary to achieve a Universal Design (UD) accessibility standard (currently at least 50% must exceed by 10%);
  - Enable some storage to be provided outside the unit and remove aggregate floor areas which limit design flexibility.

### **3) Lift/Stair Cores and Dual aspect ratios**

It is proposed to remove any limitation on the number of units per lift and stair core per floor, subject to compliance with Building Regulations (currently max. 12). This will allow more units per core in conjunction with the more flexible dwelling mix and floor area changes.

It is also proposed to introduce a single standard that requires at least 25% of all units in a development to be dual aspect. (Currently min. 50% in suburban and min. 33% in urban locations).

### **4) Private Open Space**

It is proposed to enable planning authorities may accept a reduced provision of balconies in certain circumstances where their value would be negligible, such as:

- 
- Fronting sources of noise and air pollution, such as busy roads;
  - On taller building exposed to high wind conditions;
  - or, where high quality, usable communal open space can be provided in the scheme.

The proportion of such units should not exceed 50% (currently 100%).

### **5) Car Parking**

No changes proposed, but it is necessary to reinforce the policy position relating to an overall reduction in car parking for apartment schemes, which is permissible in urban areas.

### **6) Additional Requirements**

It is proposed to preclude local authorities from having imposing additional requirements, such as 5% extra floorspace for cultural and communal activity.

### **7) Purpose Built Student Accommodation:**

Further to engagement with DFHERIS, it is proposed to introduce clear policies for purpose-built student accommodation, including no requirement for the provision of individual en-suite bathroom facilities and flexibility in relation to aggregate space standards for kitchen/dining facilities.

**From:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [James Browne \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [John McDonald \(Housing\)](#); [Siobhan NicThighearnain \(Housing\)](#); [Jack Savage \(Housing\)](#); [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#); [Lisa Clifford \(Housing\)](#); [Graham Doyle \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** FW: draft apartment guidelines  
**Date:** Friday 13 June 2025 18:01:00  
**Attachments:** [CEPP 12062025 Env Assessment for draft Apt Guidelines 11062025.pdf](#)  
[Final Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines 2025 11 June NSP.docx](#)  
[image001.jpg](#)  
[image002.jpg](#)  
[3\\_page Apartment Standards Note 130625.docx](#)

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Minister,

Some positive news - with thanks to work undertaken by Claragh, Lisa and their respective teams, it has been confirmed that the revised apartment standards planning guidelines as drafted do not require AA or SEA screening. The draft guidelines and related environmental report are attached, together with a 3-page note that summarises the principal changes. This means that there is no further consultation required and the Guidelines can now be published in final form at any stage, although it is understood that Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> June is the intended date. A memo is being drafted accordingly.

Regards,  
Paul

---

**From:** Maryann Harris (Housing) <[Maryann.Harris@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Maryann.Harris@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Thursday 12 June 2025 20:16  
**To:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Cc:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <[Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie)>; Lisa Clifford (Housing) <[Lisa.Clifford@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Lisa.Clifford@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** RE: draft apartment guidelines

Dear Jason,

I have reviewed the draft Apartment Guidelines of 4 June 2025 and the subsequent final revision of 11 June 2025. Please find attached my report based on the draft you have provided to me of 11 June 2025, my experience and my knowledge of other existing Departmental guidelines.

Following a detailed review, in my opinion, the Habitats Directive and the SEA Directive do not apply to the draft Guidelines, for reasons which I have outlined in my report. Please note that any references to case law or Commission guidance on case law are made in terms of informing a scientific assessment of the draft Guidelines and do not constitute legal advice.

Kind regards,  
Maryann

**Dr Maryann Harris** BSLA MSc Dip. Law PhD MILI ASLA  
Environmental Planning Manager

**Aonad Beartais Pleanála Aeráide agus Comhshaoil, Rannán Pleanála**  
Climate and Environmental Planning Policy Unit, Planning Division

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---

**From:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <[Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday 4 June 2025 17:25  
**To:** Maryann Harris (Housing) <[Maryann.Harris@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Maryann.Harris@housing.gov.ie)>  
**Subject:** draft apartment guidelines

Hi Maryann

As discussed the draft apartment guidelines are attached. Let me know when will have the chance to review and we can arrange a follow up meeting.

Jason

---

**Jason Taylor**  
Planning Adviser – National, Regional and Urban Planning

---

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[www.tithiocht.gov.ie](http://www.tithiocht.gov.ie)  
[www.housing.gov.ie](http://www.housing.gov.ie)

**From:** [Graham Doyle \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [James Browne \(Housing\)](#); [John McDonald \(Housing\)](#); [Siobhan NicThighearnain \(Housing\)](#); [Jack Savage \(Housing\)](#); [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#); [Lisa Clifford \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** Re: draft apartment guidelines  
**Date:** Friday 13 June 2025 19:07:34  
**Attachments:** [image001.jpg](#)  
[image002.jpg](#)

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That's great Paul. Well done to all.

Graham

On 13 Jun 2025, at 18:01, Paul Hogan (Housing)  
<[Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie](mailto:Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie)> wrote:

Minister,

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Paul

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Kind regards,  
Maryann

**Dr Maryann Harris** BSLA MSc Dip. Law PhD MILI ASLA  
Environmental Planning Manager

**Aonad Beartais Pleanála Aeráide agus Comhshaoil, Rannán Pleanála**  
Climate and Environmental Planning Policy Unit, Planning Division

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[<image001.jpg>](#)

[<image002.jpg>](#)

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**Sent:** Wednesday 4 June 2025 17:25  
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Jason

---

**Jason Taylor**  
Planning Adviser – National, Regional and Urban Planning

---

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<CEPP 12062025 Env Assessment for draft Apt Guidelines 11062025.pdf>

<Final Draft Planning Design Standards for Apartments Guidelines 2025 11  
June NSP.docx>

<3 page Apartment Standards Note 130625.docx>

**From:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Apartment sizes  
**Date:** Wednesday 18 June 2025 13:15:38  
**Attachments:** [Apartments - International Comparisons.docx](#)

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**From:** "Claragh Mulhern (Housing)" <Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie>  
**Date:** Fri 23 May 2025, 12:09  
**To:** "Paul Hogan (Housing)" <Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie>  
**CC:** "Jason Taylor (Housing)" <Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie>  
**Subject:** FW: Apartment sizes

Paul

See below and attached, with thanks to Jason.

Kind regards  
Claragh

---

**From:** Jason Taylor (Housing) <Jason.Taylor@housing.gov.ie>  
**Sent:** Friday 23 May 2025 11:38  
**To:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie>  
**Subject:** Apartment sizes

Hi Claragh,

Killian sent on the research he had been doing RE apartment sizes in other jurisdictions (see attached). Where specially applied to a studio the minimum areas come in around 35-40 sq.m (UK 37 sq.m). In many cases the min is worked out on sq.m per inhabitant basis which may come out lower. Note also for Student Studios DCC have a min of 25 sq.m. Essentially you could cherry pick which comparison best suits your argument. As such I would suggest we are best sticking to a 'mix and match' modulation argument. We can discuss further with Joan MacMahon as we progress, also in relation to some of the detail Appendix 1 (inc. some of which the LDA took issue with).

Jason

## Apartment Sizes International Comparisons

### 1. UK cities

UK Minimum Standards (NDDS 2015) remain unchanged and apply to London and all other cities. **A studio starts at 37 sqm, 1 bed at 50 sqm and a 2 bed unit starts at 61 sqm.** Note in the table below that the 37 sqm studio is permitted if it has a shower unit instead of bath. Scotland introduced a 'Tolerable Standard' in 1987 but this refers to building control measures only. Scotland shares the NDDS minimum sizes from England and Wales.

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	

### 2. Paris

The French building regulations do not identify minimum standards for housing but indicates **14 sqm square metres per inhabitant as a general rule of thumb.**

As far as the division of space inside the dwellings is concerned, excluding bathrooms, French regulations make an open-plan configuration possible as they provide neither indications on the separation of rooms nor specific standards for individual rooms, except for the single bedroom which must have a minimum surface area of 9 sqm and in any case not less than 7 sqm. The minimum height in the accommodation is 2.20 m.

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000217471>

<https://englishspeakingrealestateagentsfrance.com/french-rules-about-renting-small-spaces/>

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGITEXT000005632175>

### 3. Brussels

#### Current average sizes

- studio: 9-35 m<sup>2</sup>,
- 1-bedroom: 30-70 m<sup>2</sup>;
- 2-bedroom: 50-120 m<sup>2</sup>;
- 3-bedroom: 80-250 m<sup>2</sup>;
- 4-bedroom: 120-300+ m<sup>2</sup>.

#### Future standards

New minimum standards for all housing are being introduced from 2026 as the previous standards were deemed too low to guarantee a sufficiently high quality of life. The new standard will be that the dwelling must have a **net surface area of at least 18 sqm for one person, increasing by 10 m<sup>2</sup> for each additional occupant.**

Examples are as follows:

- Dwelling with a minimum surface area of 18 m<sup>2</sup>: one inhabitant;
- Dwelling with a minimum surface area of 28 m<sup>2</sup>: one inhabitant;
- Dwelling with a minimum surface area of 38 m<sup>2</sup>: two inhabitants;
- For student accommodation, a minimum surface area of 12 m<sup>2</sup> is sufficient.

<https://be.brussels/en/housing/new-minimum-quality-standards-2026>

### 4. Copenhagen

Previously the minimum size of dwellings in urban development areas was 50 sqm.

However, this requirement has been modified in 2024, with the minimum size requirement in urban development areas now being **40 sqm GIA.**

[https://www.colliers.com/en-dk/news/smaa-lejligheder-med-store-](https://www.colliers.com/en-dk/news/smaa-lejligheder-med-store-perspektiver#:~:text=Since%202005%2C%20new%20Copenhagen%20residential,city%20for%20families%20with%20children.)

[perspektiver#:~:text=Since%202005%2C%20new%20Copenhagen%20residential,city%20for%20families%20with%20children.](https://www.colliers.com/en-dk/news/smaa-lejligheder-med-store-perspektiver#:~:text=Since%202005%2C%20new%20Copenhagen%20residential,city%20for%20families%20with%20children.)

## 5. Amsterdam

The Netherlands legislation sets a minimum size standard of **18 sqm per inhabitant for new buildings**.

For internal divisions, the Netherlands has a standard for the living room (e.g., living room, bedroom) of 11 sqm for new buildings, which is reduced to 7.5 sqm for the existing buildings

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8073340/#:~:text=The%20Netherlands%20legislation%20%5B59%5D%20sets,m2%20for%20new%20buildings.>

## 6. Lisbon

Portugal has a General Regulation of Urban Buildings (RGEU) which only stipulates the **minimum size for studio apartments and that is 35 sqm for one person**.

The minimum standard for ceiling height is 2.70 m in the main rooms (as in Italy) and 2.20 m in the service rooms. In terms of rooms, the living room must be at least 10 sqm (plus 6 sqm for the kitchen if necessary) and the first bedroom at least 10.5 sqm.

<https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/legislacao-consolidada/decreto-lei/1951-120610500>

## 7. Barcelona

Each Spanish region sets their own standards. Madrid standards are not known at this time. However, for Barcelona, Section 3.1 Habitability and Occupancy of the Catalan government decree 141/2012 states that **all homes must have a minimum of 36 sqm**

<https://portaljuridic.gencat.cat/eli/es-ct/d/2012/10/30/141>

## 8. Rome

In Italy, as in France, the dimensional standard of the living space is measured in sqm per inhabitant.

**The minimum requirement is 14 sqm for each person** for the first 4 occupants, which is reduced to 10 sqm for each additional occupant

[https://www.bosettiegatti.eu/info/norme/statali/1975\\_dm\\_05\\_07.htm](https://www.bosettiegatti.eu/info/norme/statali/1975_dm_05_07.htm);

## 9. Sydney

The New South Wales government's Apartment Design Guide states that apartments are required to have the following minimum internal areas:

- **Studio 35 sqm**
- **1 bedroom 50 sqm**

The minimum internal areas include only one bathroom. Additional bathrooms increase the minimum internal area by 5 sqm each. A fourth bedroom and further additional bedrooms increase the minimum internal area by 12 sqm each. Every habitable room must have a window in an external wall with a total minimum glass area of not less than 10% of the floor area of the room. Daylight and air may not be borrowed from other rooms

# **Ireland Housing Statistics**

## **1. Apartment Construction**

As of end of Q4 2024, 10,213 apartments built out of 31,857 total residential units. – representing a 0.9% decrease on the previous year. The four Dublin authorities accounted for 7,961 out of the 10,213 apartments. Between January 2024 and January 2025, 30,468 apartments were commenced.

## **2. Apartment Planning**

There were 16,422 apartments granted planning permission by Q3 2024 out of a total of 36,692 residential units. This represents a decrease of 14% from the previous 12 month period.

## **3. Census 2022 - apartments**

The total purpose built apartment stock amounted to 164,886

This consisted of:

- 40,973 one bed apartments
- 99,832 2 bed apartments
- 24,081 3&4 bed apartments

In terms of respondents living in an apartment,

- 63,012 people lived in a 1 bed apartment
- 221,362 people lived in a 2 bed apartment
- 71,445 people lived in a 3&4 bed apartment

## **4. Census 2022 – Occupants of All Housing Stock (apartments & houses)**

### **Couples and parenting**

- The number of cohabiting couples without children living with others increased by 39% (+2,692) in 2022, with the average size of these households rising to 3.49 from 3.45 in 2016.
- Compared with 2016, the amount of married couples without children living with other people increased by 36% (+4,732) and the average size of these households rose from 3.31 in 2016 to 3.44 in 2022.
- There were 20% more one-parent father families with children who were renting than six years previously.
- In 2022, there were nearly a third more one-parent families with children living with other people than in 2016. The average household size in this case increased to 3.82 from 3.71 in 2016.

- 20,042 single parents lived in apartments with their children in 2022 compared with 15,146 in 2011 and 17,586 in 2016.
- 39,600 couples (both married and not married) with no children lived in purpose-built apartments in 2022 compared with 34,728 in 2011 and 36,331 in 2016
- 89,890 children lived in purpose-built apartments in 2022 compared with 69,643 in 2011 and 83,851 in 2016

### **Family size**

- Since 1996, there has been a 26% fall in the average number of children per family
- The number of families with no children increased by 11% in 2022 compared with 2016 and by 14% compared with 2011.
- In contrast, the number of families with four or more children decreased by 7% in the six years to 2022 and by 10% since Census 2011.

### **Living alone**

- In Census 2022, there were 425,974 people living alone. This was an increase of 7% (+26,159) since 2016 and accounted for 8% of all persons living in private households.
- Just over half (52%) of all people living alone were female.
- 107,218 were widowed
- 82,089 were separated or divorced
- Of those living alone, 89% were Irish citizens and almost 39,000 (9%) stated they had non-Irish citizenship.
- The highest number of people living alone was in Dublin City, 61,525 followed by County Cork with 49,705 people.

### **Living with parents**

- In 2022, there were 522,486 adults aged 18 years and over who were living with their parents.
- This was a 14% increase (+63,612) compared with 2016 and a 19% increase since 2011 (+83,008).
- This accounted for 13% of the adult population (aged 18 years and over), the same proportion as in 2011 and 2016.
- In 2022, 81% of all 18 and 19 year olds lived in the same household as their parents, up from 78% in 2011 and 80% in 2016.
- Over 61% of 20 to 24 year olds lived with their parents in 2022, an increase from 54% in 2011 and 59% in 2016.
- Broadening the age group, 22% of 18 to 50 year olds lived with their parents in 2022 whereas only 19% in this age group lived with their parents in 2011 and 20% in 2016.

## **Effectiveness of 2018 guidelines – SCSi report**

A 'one year on' review of 2018 guidelines and impact on industry was produced for the then Minister by Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (Paul Mitchell) in July 2019. They found that the 2018 guidelines had a positive impact on costs reduction overall (at the time of the report). Other issues such as building regs and utilities connections remained a hindrance.

### **Positive impact on delivery**

- Reducing dual aspect
- 12 apartments per core and no restriction for BTR (reduction of €7-9k per unit)
- Minimal parking (reduction of €17-35k per unit)
- New 63 sqm 2b3p size (reduction of €5-8k per unit)
- Relaxing the mix
- Co-living
- Floor to ceiling heights

### **Negative impact on delivery**

- Bike storage

**From:** [Paul Hogan \(Housing\)](#)  
**To:** [John McDonald \(Housing\)](#)  
**Cc:** [Claragh Mulhern \(Housing\)](#); [Jason Taylor \(Housing\)](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Apartment sizes internationally  
**Date:** Saturday 5 July 2025 13:28:00  
**Attachments:** [Examples old v new standards.xlsx](#)

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Hi John,

The attached includes some worked examples of the new apartment standards would mean in terms of development mix/space/units. In all cases, a 100 unit scheme using current standards is the start point. The additional impact of less stair cores has not been taken into account.

At the maximum end of things, the new standards would enable up to 80% more apartment units in the same building footprint i.e. 180 as opposed to 100, (if all were to be changed to studios), likely to be even more with less stair cores. The examples attached demonstrate that while enabling more units, this approach would result in a reduction in bedspaces, unless a high proportion of the studios (approaching half) were to be occupied by more than 1 person (but not unrealistic). Alternatively, the same 100 units, converted to studios would occupy 44% less floorspace, again, likely even less space with fewer stair cores. Either way, far more separate units can be produced on any given site, but noting a headline reduction in bedspaces.

A more realistic scenario in terms of development mix will be greater flexibility across the different units types and will result in around 25% more units in the same building footprint i.e. 124 as opposed to 100, (while still retaining a good mix of unit types) and even more with less stair cores. Example G attached demonstrates that while enabling more units, this approach would result in only a slight reduction in bedspaces (7.5%), and none at all if all of the studios were to be occupied by more than 1 person (again, that is not unrealistic).

On this basis it is reasonable to conclude that the new standards will enable more flexibility and more units, in the range of up to 20-80% more depending on unit mix, with no increase in bedspaces (which is relevant in terms of impact on car parking etc.), with the most likely outcome being somewhere between one-quarter and one-third more (25-33%) units taking into account a typical marketable dwelling mix and a reduction in stair cores that could be occupied by further units.

Regards  
Paul

**From:** Claragh Mulhern (Housing) <Claragh.Mulhern@housing.gov.ie>  
**Sent:** Saturday 5 July 2025 11:18  
**To:** John McDonald (Housing) <John.McDonald@housing.gov.ie>  
**Cc:** Paul Hogan (Housing) <Paul.Hogan@housing.gov.ie>

**Subject:** Apartment sizes internationally

John

See attached,

Kind regards Claragh

**Example A**

**100 Unit Apartment Development @ Current Min. Floor Area and Mix**

%	Type	Bedspaces	Total Beds	Min M2	No.	Total M2
25%	Studio	1	25	37	25	925
25%	1 bed	2	50	45	25	1125
10%	2 bed 3P	3	30	63	10	630
40%	2 bed 4P	4	160	73	40	2920
<b>Total</b>			<b>265</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>5600</b>

Requirement for >50% Units at least 10% larger

					plus 10%	
25%	1 bed		45	25	1125	1237.5
10%	2 bed 3P		63	10	630	693
16%	2 bed 4P		73	16	1168	1284.8
			<b>51</b>		<b>2923</b>	<b>3215.3</b>

Total Development

	51	3215.3
	49	2677
<b>100</b>	<b>5892.3</b>	105.22%

**Example D**

**Apartment Development under new Guidelines in same building size (total floor area) as Example A**

%	Type	Bedspaces	Total Beds	Min M2	No.	Total M2
100%	Studio	1	180	32	180	5760
<b>Total</b>			<b>180</b>		<b>180</b>	<b>5760</b>

Requirement for min 25% Units at least 10% larger

					plus 10%	
25%	Studio		32	45	1440	1584
			<b>135</b>		<b>1440</b>	<b>1584</b>

Total Development

	45	1584
	135	4320
<b>180</b>	<b>5904</b>	102.50%

**Example D**

Enables up to 80% more units in same floor area.

32% reduction in bedspaces if studios single-occupancy

If 50% studios double-occupied, no significant change in bedspaces of c+1.9%

If 100% studios double-occupied, increase in bedspaces is 35.8%

**Example E**

**More Typical 100 Unit Apartment Development mix @ Current Min. Floor Area and Mix**

%	Type	Bedspaces	Total Beds	Min M2	No.	Total M2
5%	Studio	1	5	37	5	185

25% 1 bed	2	50	45	25	1125
10% 2 bed 3P	3	30	63	10	630
50% 2 bed 4P	4	200	73	50	3650
10% 3 bed 5P	5	50	90	10	900
<b>Total</b>		<b>335</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>6490</b>

Requirement for >50% Units at least 10% larger					plus 10%	
25% 1 bed			45	25	1125	1237.5
10% 2 bed 3P			63	10	630	693
16% 2 bed 4P			73	16	1168	1284.8
				<b>51</b>	<b>2923</b>	<b>3215.3</b>

Total Development				51	3215.3	
				49	3567	
				<b>100</b>	<b>6782.3</b>	104.50%

### Example G

#### Apartment Development under new Guidelines in same Building Size (Floor Area) as Example E

%	Type	Bedspaces	Total Beds	Min M2	No.	Total M2
20%	Studio	1	25	32	25	800
30%	1 bed	2	74	45	37	1665
30%	2 bed 3P	3	111	63	37	2331
20%	2 bed 4P	4	100	73	25	1825
<b>Total</b>			<b>310</b>		<b>124</b>	<b>6621</b>
						6490

Requirement for min 25% Units at least 10% larger					plus 10%	
25% 1 bed			45	31	1395	1534.5
				<b>31</b>		<b>1534.5</b>

Total Development				31	1534.5	
				93	5226	
				<b>124</b>	<b>6760.5</b>	102.11%

24% more units in slightly less floorspace than in E  
7.5% reduction in bedspaces if studios single-occupancy  
If 100% studios double-occupied, no change in bedspaces

**Example B**

**100 Unit Apartment Development @ New Min. Floor Area and Mix**

%	Bedspaces	Total Beds	Type	M2	No.	Total M2
100%	1	100	Studio	32	100	3200
<b>Total</b>					<b>100</b>	<b>3200</b>

New Requirement for min 25% Units at least 10% larger				plus 10%	
25%		Studio	32	25	800
				<b>25</b>	<b>880</b>

Total Development

75	2400
25	880
<b>100</b>	<b>3280</b>

**Example B**

Same number of units in 44.33% less floorspace than in A

Significant 62% reduction in bedspaces if studios single-occupancy

If 50% studios double-occupied, reduction in bedspaces is commensurate with floor area reduction

If 100% studios double-occupied, reduction in bedspaces is 24.5%

^

**Example F**

**More Flexible Typical 100 Unit Apartment Development mix @ New Min. Floor Area and Mix**

%	Type	Bedspaces	Total Beds	Min M2	No.	Total M2
15%	Studio	1	15	32	15	480

25% 1 bed	2	50	45	25	1125	
30% 2 bed 3P	3	90	63	30	1890	
30% 2 bed 4P	4	120	73	30	2190	
<b>Total</b>		<b>275</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>5685</b>	
Requirement for min 25% Units at least 10% larger						plus 10%
25% 1 bed			45	25	1125	1237.5
				<b>25</b>		<b>1237.5</b>
Total Development						
				25	1237.5	
				75	4560	
				<b>100</b>	<b>5797.5</b>	101.98%

Same number of units in 14.5% less floorspace than in E  
17.9% reduction in bedspaces if studios single-occupancy  
If 100% studios double-occupied, reduction in bedspaces is 13.4%

**Example C**

**100 Unit Apartment Development comprising 1 beds only @ New Unit Mix**

%	Bedspaces	Total Beds	Type	M2	No.	Total M2
100%	2	100	1 bed		45	100 4500
<b>Total</b>					<b>100</b>	<b>4500</b>

New Requirement for min 25% Units at least 10% larger						plus 10%
25%		1 bed		45	25	1125 1237.5
					<b>25</b>	<b>1237.5</b>

Total Development						
					75	3375
					25	1237.5
					<b>100</b>	<b>4612.5</b>
						78.28%

Same number of units in 21.72% less floorspace than in A  
Reduction in bedspaces is 24.5%