

Watford Borough Council

**Co-Living: Standards and
Requirements**

**Supplementary Planning Document
(SPD)**

Consultation Draft
February 2025

watfordlocalplan.co.uk



Foreword

Co-living is an emerging housing model that is rapidly gaining popularity, with 13,383 co-living units currently under construction or with planning permission across the UK in 2024. Whilst to date, this sector has largely focused on major cities, there is growing interest in developing co-living schemes in Watford. This interest is driven by Watford's proximity to key employment hubs, excellent transport links, and a strong housing market.

Co-living provides a shared living experience where residents have private rooms alongside shared amenity spaces that encourage social interaction and a vibrant community atmosphere. This model can offer a sustainable, high-quality, and secure alternative to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and other forms of private rented housing.

The Council recognises and welcomes the opportunities these schemes can offer as part of our broader housing strategy. However, we are also aware of the potential challenges, such as social isolation or a reduced quality of life, if these developments are not well designed and of poor quality. Co-living developments must therefore be effectively integrated into the community to ensure their success.

To address these concerns, the Council has taken the proactive step of creating this supplementary planning guidance for co-living schemes. This guidance has been developed before any co-living projects are approved in the borough to ensure that, from the outset, co-living schemes in Watford are:

- Well-designed
- Providing a high quality of life for residents
- Well-integrated into the local community
- Complying with appropriate space and amenity standards

The Council is consulting on this guidance to gather input from all interested parties. This collaborative approach will help ensure that this new form of development benefits both the town's existing and future community.

Councillor Glen Saffery

Portfolio Holder for Planning

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Introduction

- 1.1 This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) comprises additional guidance on the implementation of Policy HO3.6 of the Watford Local Plan (2021-2038) that was adopted by Watford Borough Council in October 2022. Figure 1 below shows how this SPD interacts and relates to the adopted Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

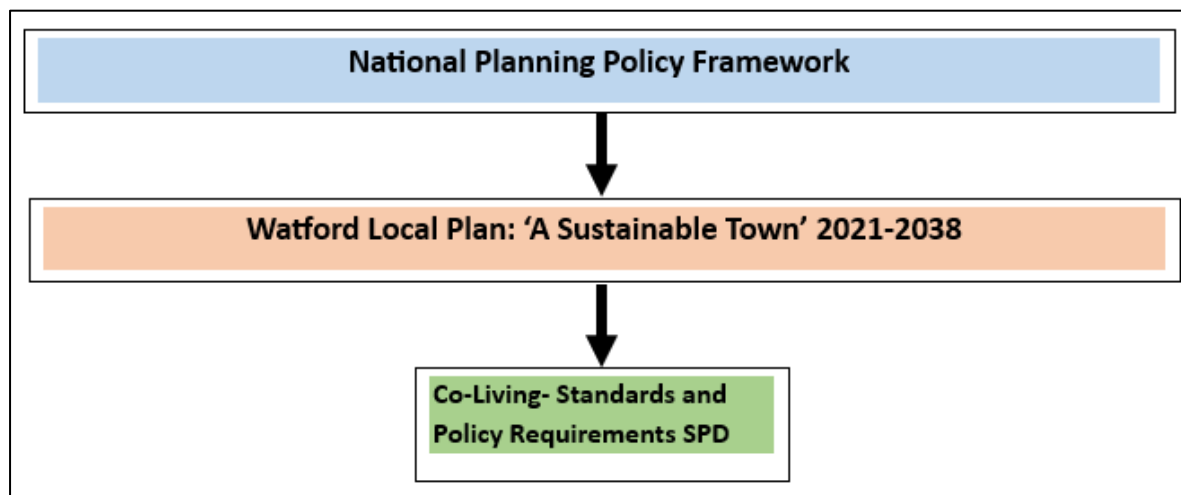


Figure 1: Watford Borough Council Co-living: Standards and Requirements SPD structure

- 1.2 Co-living is a distinct form of sui generis development that is characterised by private studio rooms which provide residents with functional living space. These rooms are supported by a wide range of shared communal amenity areas and facilities. This results in a particular emphasis on communal living and social interaction.
- 1.3 Watford Borough Council has seen a substantial increase in the level of planning interest in co-living schemes over the two years since the Local Plan's adoption. Whilst it is a typology that has so far been focused nationally on major urban centres like London, it is clear that there is a growing market for co-living outside of big cities and Watford is increasingly being seen as a potentially viable location.
- 1.4 This is why additional planning guidance is considered necessary to ensure that co-living proposals are high quality, well designed and that they contribute effectively to achieving the wider vision and objectives of the Local Plan. The guidance will complement Local Plan policy HO3.6 which provides in principle support for co-living schemes in certain locations in the borough.
- 1.5 This document will apply to all proposals for co-living in Watford, and it will be used, alongside other relevant Local Plan policies, to assess the suitability and quality of applications against a range of different criteria and standards.
- 1.6 In assessing co-living schemes there will be a recognition in decision making that, despite not being defined as C3 residential dwellings, they will similarly become people's homes. Within the framework provided by both the Local Plan and this SPD co-living schemes will

therefore be held to the same high standards in terms of quality and amenity as all other forms of residential development.

- 1.7 An SPD focused on developer contributions towards affordable housing is being produced in parallel with this SPD and sets out the specific approach to calculating affordable housing contributions for co-living schemes. Both these documents should be considered when putting forward co-living schemes.
- 1.8 Once adopted, this SPD will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Policy Context

- 2.1 This section summarises the relevant national and local policy context for this SPD. Due to the emerging nature of co-living as a 'housing' typology, there is limited specific guidance in current national policy.

National Policy

- 2.2 The latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ was published in December 2024 and there is no reference in the document to either purpose built shared living generally or co-living specifically.
- 2.3 The NPPF does however state that it is important "*that the needs of groups with specific requirements are addressed*" and that "*the overall aim should be to meet an area's identified housing need, including with an appropriate mix of housing types for the local community.*"
- 2.4 Co-living can provide a specific housing offer that is not delivered through regular C3 class market housing for sale, private rented housing, or through affordable housing tenures. It can therefore be seen as meeting a certain housing need that arises through either necessity or choice.

Local Policy

- 2.5 Policy HO3.6 of the Watford Local Plan² provides high level support for co-living and other forms of non-self-contained accommodation provided that it:
 - Is located within the Core Development Area, or within 800m of a railway station located in the Core Development Area.
 - Incorporates a high quality of design and generous communal shared space and amenities for all occupants.
 - Is for a minimum of 50 units.
 - Is supported by a management plan as part of the application.
- 2.6 This SPD includes further detail on the above policy requirements where appropriate.

¹ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/675abd214cbda57cacd3476e/NPPF-December-2024.pdf>

² <https://www.watford.gov.uk/localplan>

- 2.7 The policy also requires that proposals for co-living make a financial contribution towards affordable housing in accordance with Policy HO3.3 of the Local Plan.

Defining Co-living

- 3.1 There is no single definition of co-living provided in national planning policy guidance. They are however a form of large-scale, shared, residential accommodation which is purposefully designed, usually for individual renters, and retained within a single ownership. Schemes are supported by a comprehensive on-site management operation.
- 3.2 They contain private, usually single occupancy, studio rooms alongside a range of communal amenities and services that include kitchens, living areas, dining areas, lounge areas, leisure and workspace facilities. The majority, if not all, bills and service charges are usually included in a single all-inclusive monthly rent.
- 3.3 It is not considered suitable development for children and so an under 18 age restriction is applied to ensure that the rooms are suitably occupied.
- 3.4 Co-living is usually classified as being a sui generis use and as such changes of use to a co-living scheme are not permitted development and always require planning permission.

Co-living versus other typologies

This section focuses on the specific differences between co-living and other forms of residential typologies.

C3 Residential development

- 3.5 Co-living is not classified as C3 residential development for the following reasons:
- It does not provide a secure, long term housing solution.
 - The private studio rooms do not meet nationally described space standards that would be required for C3 residential units.
 - It requires additional communal facilities and services to be provided that would not be expected as standard on a C3 residential development.
- 3.6 Schemes are normally made up of single occupancy studio rooms although rooms for couples could be incorporated if they are designed appropriately and where it is demonstrated that the emphasis was still on communal living. Under no circumstances will co-living be a way of getting permission for sub-standard self-contained residential apartments.

Affordable Housing

- 3.7 The specific nature of co-living means that the private rooms are not required to meet national space standards, or some other minimum standards that would be expected by either national or local policy on C3 residential housing schemes. It does not therefore provide a suitable long term housing option for meeting needs identified on the housing register.

3.8 It is not considered to be an affordable housing product itself, and as such an additional contribution towards affordable housing will be required in accordance with Policy HO3.6 of the Watford Local Plan. This contribution will usually be provided by way of an off-site financial contribution³.

Student Accommodation

3.9 Whilst co-living schemes are similar in nature to some purpose build student accommodation, they are not attached or affiliated to any university or college and do not require a prospective resident to be studying in higher education in order to sign a tenancy agreement. This does not preclude rooms within a co-living scheme being occupied by students.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

3.10 Co-living differs from HMOs due to the schemes expected size⁴, and the amount of internal and external amenity spaces and facilities required.

Hotels, Guesthouses or Hostels

3.11 Co-living schemes differ from hotels, guesthouses or hostels due to a requirement for a minimum tenancy length of three months and the emphasis that is placed on encouraging communal interaction and activity.

3.12 The tenancy agreement for a co-living unit would also be attached to a specific room within the development and so unlike in a hotel or guesthouse, there could be no moving of residents from one room to another without amending a legally binding tenancy agreement.

Features of a Co-living Scheme

3.13 The following facilities and services are considered to be important in defining a scheme as a co-living development. More detail on the specific standards and expectations for each element, are set out within this SPD.

- Private en-suite studio rooms
- Internal communal space
- External communal space
- Laundry and drying facilities
- On-site management, maintenance, and cleaning services
- Reception or concierge service
- Tenancy agreements for all residents with a minimum length of three months (or 90 days)
- Large item storage and cycle storage

3.14 It is expected that co-living schemes will incorporate all of these criteria as a minimum. It is not considered exhaustive and extra elements that assist in delivering a high quality shared living scheme should be included

³ Calculated in accordance with the methodology set out in local guidance

⁴ Local Plan policy HO3.6 requires that co-living schemes are a minimum of 50 private units

- 3.15 Additional facilities that residents may incur a cost to use, and/or which are not for the exclusive use of residents may also be provided.

Designing a Co-Living Scheme in Watford

- 4.1 The following sections will outline the specific requirements of a high quality, well-designed Co-Living scheme in Watford, and the quantitative and qualitative standards that should be met.
- 4.2 A statement will be expected accompanying applications that demonstrates how the proposal would conform with the requirements of this SPD. This will help the Council to consider the quality of schemes and the level of compliance with this guidance.

Locational Requirements

- 4.3 The Local Plan includes clear guidance on where co-living developments would be supported in principle, stating the following in Policy HO3.6:

“New student and co-living and non-self-contained accommodation will be supported where it is located within the Core Development Area, or within 800 metres of a railway station located in the Core Development Area.”

- 4.4 This sets clear parameters for where co-living development is considered to be acceptable and therefore no additional guidance over and above this is thought to be necessary in this document.
- 4.5 It should be noted however that a scheme being located within a location considered acceptable in Policy HO3.6 of the Local Plan does not automatically mean it will be approved. Proposals will be assessed on a case by case basis against the other criteria and policies in the Local Plan and against the planning guidance in this SPD to ensure that schemes will provide high quality living standards and that they are well designed.

Design Considerations

- 4.6 All proposals for purpose built shared living will be assessed against the design policies in the Local Plan to ensure that the scheme is high quality, that it optimises site capacity and that it contributes positively to local character and context.
- 4.7 A few overarching design considerations are listed below:
- All private rooms should have at least one standard sized window that is located on a vertical façade;
 - Building frontages should be active, particularly those that face onto a street or public space;
 - Public realm and landscaping around the development should ensure that the scheme integrates effectively with its surrounding area and be of a quantity that is proportionate to the schemes density;
 - A sufficient proportion of private rooms and all communal areas should be accessible to those with reduced mobility;

- Proposals should take account of the requirements in Policies CC8.2, CC8.3 and CC8.5 to ensure that the building meets, or exceeds, the sustainability standards expected from new development;
- If the proposal is taller than the base building heights set out in Table 6.1 of the Local Plan then the requirements of Policy QD6.5 will apply. This means that the scheme would be expected to be of ‘outstanding design quality’, deliver ‘significant public benefits’ and ‘significant sustainability benefits’ in terms of its design, construction, operation, and connectivity to the surrounding area. A statement from the applicant should be provided to outline how the requirements of Policy QD6.5 have been complied with;
- The scheme must consider its impacts on the historic environment in according with HE7.1, HE7.2 and HE7.3 of the Local Plan and an application should demonstrate that it would conserve or enhance the setting of any affected listed buildings or conservation areas;
- Sufficient cores should be included to serve the number of private rooms on each floor. These cores should all include both lifts and stairs.

4.8 The following sections of this SPD provide more specific advice on the design, layout and standards for particular elements of a co-living scheme.

Private Room Standards

- 4.9 Private rooms within a co-living development need to be sized appropriately. On the one hand, they must provide sufficient space to allow for comfortable sleeping, relaxing and storage for residents, but on the other they should not be large enough to reduce the overall emphasis on communal living and become poor quality self-contained units that are just below nationally described space standards.
- 4.10 London’s ‘Large Scale Purpose Built Shared Living SPD’⁵ which was adopted in February 2024 sets a minimum size requirement of 18sqm and a maximum size requirement of 27sqm for private rooms on a co-living scheme. By way of comparison, Birmingham’s ‘Large Scale Purpose Built Shared Accommodation SPD’⁶ sets a single 25sqm size requirement for all private rooms.
- 4.11 Given Watford’s location close to London it is considered appropriate to broadly align with the standards already expected in London. This SPD therefore similarly suggests a minimum private room size requirement of 18sqm and a maximum of 27sqm for single occupancy. This broadly aligns with the average room sizes being put forward by applicants as part of pre-application proposals in Watford so far⁷.
- 4.12 Allowing a range of room sizes has the benefit of ensuring that the scheme could suit a range of different resident budgets and needs. A mix of private room sizes would therefore be supported within the above size range.

⁵ [Large-scale purpose-built shared living London Plan Guidance - Feb 24](#)

⁶ [Large Scale Shared Accommodation Supplementary Planning Document \(SPD\) | Birmingham City Council](#)

⁷ The average private room size on pre-application schemes in Watford up to June 2024 was 21sqm

4.13 In complying with these space standards, consideration should also be given to both the length, height and width of rooms. Overly long and thin, or short and wide rooms should be avoided. A generous floor to ceiling height can make rooms feel larger and more open than low ceiling heights and so are encouraged. These principles should also apply to other areas of the building including communal areas and corridors.

4.14 It is expected that a proportion of the private rooms will be designed to be accessible and useable by those of reduced mobility. These accessible units should be designed in accordance with Part M of the building regulations. The exact proportion that are to be defined as 'accessible' should be based on discussions between the developer and the local authority.

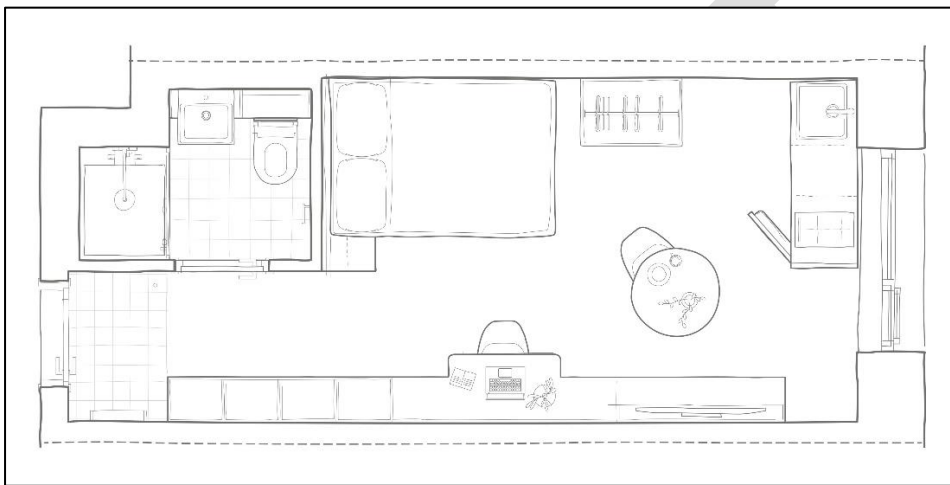


Figure 2: Indicative standard co-living room plan based on a 21sqm room size

4.15 It is expected that accessible rooms will be larger than the standard private units and their layout should ensure there is adequate space to allow easy manoeuvrability. Accessible units should be 28-37sqm⁸.

4.16 Any rooms that are designed to not be single occupancy should reflect this in their layout, size and storage arrangement; they should not simply be an enlarged version of a single room. Any double occupancy should also be reflected in the level of amenity space required across the scheme. This is why the required amenity space, as set out in this SPD, is applied per resident and not per room. Schemes that have a high proportion of units that are not for single occupancy should be avoided.

4.17 All private rooms should receive adequate daylight, sunlight, ventilation, outlook, privacy and protection from noise. They should all have at least one suitably sized window on an external vertical side elevation that is openable to allow fresh air into the room. This window should have an acceptable aspect that provides adequate views and should not for example, look straight onto blank walls. Obscured glazing of windows in a private room should be avoided.

⁸ The London SPD also requires accessible co-living rooms to be 28-37sqm. From an analysis of pre-application schemes in Watford up to June 2024 this would appear to align with what has been proposed

- 4.18 Roof lights in place of side elevation windows will not be accepted other than where a side elevation window would be impossible or impractical to achieve, and where it is demonstrated that the room would still receive adequate daylight, sunlight and ventilation.
- 4.19 Within every private room, it would be expected that the following are provided as standard:
- A double bed;
 - An en-suite bathroom that is of a sufficient size and suitably ventilated to avoid risks of damp. This bathroom should include as a minimum: a toilet, sink, storage space, and a shower that is within a demarcated area.
 - Seating and dining space that incorporates a table, dining chair and space to sit and relax⁹;
 - A kitchenette that includes the following:
 - Hobs,
 - Storage and counter space¹⁰;
 - A mini fridge¹¹ which fits neatly into a designated space;
 - A sink¹² and draining space;
 - Plug sockets for a toaster, kettle and small cooking appliance like a microwave or airfryer¹³.
 - A wardrobe;
 - Storage space within the bathroom, the kitchenette area and the main living area. Preference for both shelves for display as well as concealed storage;
 - Desk space that can be used for solo work or studying; and
 - A range of suitably located plug sockets to allow for working at the desk, charging multiple devices and for larger electrical items like a television. The bathroom should include a shaver socket.
- 4.20 This list is not exhaustive and rooms that include additional facilities will be supported, provided that they would not lead to the room having insufficient floorspace to move around in comfortably or reduce the emphasis on communal living.
- 4.21 If a proposal came forward that did not include one of the features above, then this would need to be robustly justified as to why it is not required and what alternative arrangements are in place.

⁹ Sofa or armchair

¹⁰ Counter space should be sufficient to allow basic food preparation to take place, and for a toaster, kettle and a small cooking appliance such as a microwave to be placed on it at the same time.

¹¹ Preferably also incorporating some freezer space.

¹² In addition to the sink provided in the bathroom

¹³ There should be sufficient plug sockets to allow all these items to remain in position at all times without the need to continuously unplug each.

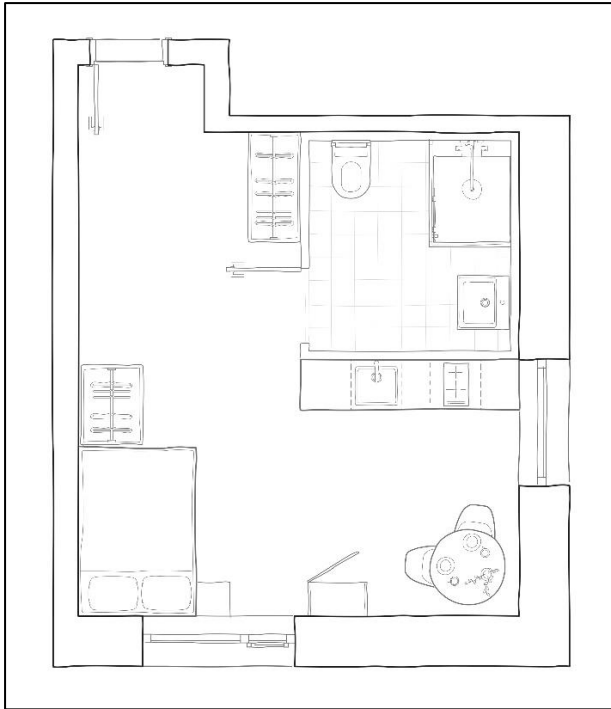


Figure 3: Indicative accessible co-living room plan based on a 31sqm room size

- 4.22 Figures 2 and 3 show floor plans of a typical standard (21sqm) and accessible (31sqm) co-living room taking into account the guidance above and best practice. The sizes have been chosen as intentionally towards the bottom end of the acceptable range in this SPD, and the layouts are indicative. They are not intended to be seen as a constraint on any alternative layouts being put forward that would equally meet the requirements of this SPD.
- 4.23 Rooms should fully comply with the latest standards for fire safety in terms of their layouts. A commentary on how these standards have been reflected in the schemes design should be provided as part of the planning application and fire safety arrangements should form part of the Management Plan accompanying the application.
- 4.24 A checklist is provided in Appendix A to help applicants and officers demonstrate and review compliance with the above requirements for private rooms.

Communal Kitchen Standards

- 4.25 Communal kitchens should be located in the best locations within the building to encourage and maximise their use. Co-location with external amenity space is encouraged to allow for outdoor dining opportunities as well as other events that could benefit from a transition between inside and outside spaces.
- 4.26 They should be of sufficient size to allow multiple people to be safely and comfortably using them at once and each area should incorporate storage and dining space to allow for communal eating and socialising. Kitchen space should therefore be provided at a rate of 0.5sqm per resident¹⁴.

¹⁴ This standard aligns with that which is currently applied in the adopted London SPG

- 4.27 An applicant will be expected to demonstrate how the quantum of kitchen space being provided will be sufficient in terms of features and accessibility to support the number of residents in the development.
- 4.28 Each communal kitchen area would be expected to include sufficient provision of the following:
- Oven space;
 - Hob space;
 - Small cooking appliances such as Microwave(s) or Airfyer(s);
 - Kettle(s)
 - Toaster(s)
 - Fridge and Freezer(s)¹⁵;
 - Dishwasher(s);
 - Sink with drainage area;
 - Refuse facilities including recycling and designated food waste bins;
 - Storage for, and sufficient provision of, utensils, crockery, cooking pots and pans as well as space for non-chilled foods to be stored; and
 - Spare plug sockets for any other appliances or electrical items that may need to be used.
- 4.29 The Management Plan accompanying applications should provide details on how the kitchen areas will be cleaned and serviced. The refuse should be collected from these areas regularly enough to avoid overspill and odour issues.

Laundry Services

- 4.30 A co-living scheme should incorporate communal laundry space that is conveniently located and well ventilated. These spaces should be separate from any laundry area used by building management.
- 4.31 The number of washer/dryers provided should be sufficient to support the number of residents proposed and there should be no additional charge to residents for using these facilities. Irons and ironing boards should be made available for resident use within these areas.
- 4.32 It is unlikely that residents will wish to share the same washer/dryer meaning only one person will normally be able to use a machine at once. The preference is therefore for a larger number of smaller washer/dryers rather than a smaller number of large ones
- 4.33 Details of the laundry arrangements for the building should be outlined in the Management Plan. Flexible and innovative approaches towards providing sufficient laundry space and facilities will be supported.
- 4.34 Laundry areas will not be counted towards the total calculation of internal amenity space, but it could include some basic seating to allow people to wait for their laundry to finish.

¹⁵ Either combined or separate

4.35 It may be possible to co-locate the laundry space with other compatible uses, for example large item storage or a small workshop space if it was in a suitable location within the scheme and big enough to allow the space to be used for both purposes effectively.

Internal Amenity Space

4.36 One of the defining features of a co-living scheme is the emphasis on communal living and the Council considers that providing sufficient communal space is fundamental to the success of such schemes. As such, great weight should be attached to providing sufficient, diverse and high quality internal amenity spaces. These spaces should suit a variety of needs and be areas that residents are encouraged to, and want to, use regularly.

4.37 The SPDs adopted in Birmingham and London set a requirement for 4.5sqm and 4sqm per resident of internal amenity space respectively¹⁶.

4.38 An analysis of pre-application schemes received in Watford so far indicate that applicants have been submitting proposals at the lower end of this range¹⁷. There is a desire to ensure that this target is met on all co-living schemes in the future to improve their quality. 4sqm per resident is therefore considered a good minimum starting point for the amount of internal amenity space required on co-living proposals in Watford.

4.39 Any proposal that includes less internal amenity space than required by this SPD will require evidence and justification to demonstrate that the amenity space being provided would be sufficient in size and quality to support the needs of all residents on the scheme.

4.40 As is the case in London, a tiered approach to providing internal amenity space will be accepted on large schemes. Details of this tiered system is set out below in Table 1:

Table 1: Internal Amenity Space Standards	
Up to 100 residents	4sqm per resident
Every additional resident from 101-400 residents	3sqm per additional resident
Every additional resident- 401 residents and above	2sqm per additional resident

4.41 Internal amenity space can take many forms and any areas that fall within the following broad categories can be included within the total floorspace calculation.

- Communal kitchen space;
- Communal dining space;
- Living rooms and lounge areas;
- Communal workspaces;

¹⁶ In London, the 4sqm requirement is tiered so that the floorspace per resident reduces on large schemes over 101 residents and then over 401 residents.

¹⁷ Average internal amenity floorspace proposed on pre-application schemes to June 2024 in Watford has been 4sqm per person

- Communal gyms and fitness spaces;
- Any other recreation space that isn't excluded under the bullet point list below.

- 4.42 Amenity spaces should allow for both small and large social gatherings to take place as well as providing quieter areas. They should collectively support relaxing, socialising, dining, communal working and studying. All spaces should be designed in a way that encourages and facilitates interactions between residents.
- 4.43 All amenity space should be accessible to all residents and should receive an appropriate level of natural daylight and ventilation for the proposed use¹⁸. They should be fully integrated into the schemes design and should be of a reasonable shape and size to enable and encourage regular use by residents for a variety of activities.
- 4.44 Applicants should clearly show on plans which amenity spaces are intended for exclusive use by residents and which will have a form of public access. Whilst some mixed public and private amenity space is supported, there should also be a reasonable amount of amenity space that is secure and available only to residents.
- 4.45 Whilst it is possible for amenity space that is not exclusively for use by residents to be taken into account, it will be expected that a significant amount of communal space is for residents' exclusive use.
- 4.46 The following areas are specifically excluded from the calculation of internal amenity space.
- Private rooms;
 - Laundry areas;
 - Communal toilets;
 - Any areas primarily used for storage;
 - Any external communal spaces;
 - Transitional areas such as corridors, stair and lift cores, and lobby areas;
 - Parking areas¹⁹; and
 - Space that is used predominantly by on-site management, facilities or staff.
- 4.47 The internal amenity space that is being included within the total floorspace figure should be clearly labelled on plans and described in both quantitative and qualitative terms in the application documents. It would be helpful if applicants provided an estimated minimum journey time from the furthest private room to a communal amenity space.
- 4.48 Table B in Appendix A is provided for use by both applicants and officers to easily demonstrate and review what quantum of floorspace is being included as internal communal space.

¹⁸ There may be some amenity spaces that do not require a large amount of natural daylight to operate effectively, for example cinema rooms. The level of daylight considered appropriate will therefore be lower for these use types although appropriate ventilation should still be provided.

¹⁹ For either cars, bicycles or any other vehicles.

Workspace

- 4.49 Sufficient communal workspace should be provided to enable hybrid working for residents. These spaces are becoming increasingly essential elements of a co-living scheme, with more people regularly working from home or having agile working hours.
- 4.50 It will be beneficial for a scheme to incorporate both formal workspace with individual work stations that are served by multiple charging points, screens and adjustable desk chairs; as well as more informal workspace for those who prefer.
- 4.51 Tea and coffee facilities, a water tap or fountain, a fridge and a sink should be considered within or adjoining these areas, and waste and recycling bins should be provided.
- 4.52 Meeting and breakout rooms should also be considered to allow in person or virtual discussions and meetings to be undertaken in confidence. These rooms could also be made available for resident meetings and events as necessary.
- 4.53 Communal workspaces can be counted in any calculation of internal amenity space provided they are accessible to residents at no additional cost.
- 4.54 High speed broadband should be provided across the entire development, to allow for both work and recreation uses to take place in all communal and private areas.

Toilets

- 4.55 As referred to above, an en-suite toilet should be provided in every private room in the development and additional communal toilets should be provided in convenient locations throughout the scheme.
- 4.56 The location and amount of toilets provided should comply with building regulations
- 4.57 All communal toilets must be cleaned regularly to ensure that they remain in good condition and that they are hygienic and pleasant to use. The specific cleaning and servicing arrangements should be set out in the management plan submitted with the application.

Storage

- 4.58 Each private room should include sufficient storage space for clothes²⁰, luggage, personal items, and bathroom items. The Council will support well designed, innovative solutions to storage that maximises both storage space and floorspace within rooms.
- 4.59 Other communal storage facilities should be considered outside of private rooms. This could include lockers which are available to residents and a designated large storage facility to keep oversize items that do not fit comfortably into private rooms. A post room or facility for the storage of packages received whilst residents are not at home should also be provided.

²⁰ This should include designated space for hanging clothes up straight.

- 4.60 Provision for the storage/parking of bicycles should be incorporated into the scheme in accordance with Policy QD6.4 of the Watford Local Plan which states that new buildings should include the following:

'Secure cycle parking should be provided in easily accessible and convenient locations.'

- 4.61 The amount of cycle storage provided will need to be considered appropriate to serve the number of residents on the scheme and encourage active travel. The London SPG requires a provision of 0.75 cycle spaces per person which should be a starting point for considering the quantum of cycle spaces required. If an applicant put forward a proposal for less than this amount of cycle storage then it will need to demonstrate as to why the provision being put forward is sufficient and the extent to which allowing a reduced amount of cycle parking would result in an alternative planning gain elsewhere.

External Amenity Space

- 4.62 In addition to internal amenity space, it is expected that a sufficient amount of external amenity spaces will also be provided on co-living schemes.
- 4.63 An analysis of pre-applications received in Watford up to June 2024 shows provision of just under 3sqm per resident on average of external amenity floorspace being put forward. The London SPD sets a benchmark target of 1sqm per resident up to 400 residents.
- 4.64 It is recognised that on high density urban sites, providing large amounts of useable external communal floorspace may be difficult, and so a flexible approach will be taken to determining the amount of external amenity floorspace that will be required on each development. Any scheme should however aim to provide at least 1sqm of external amenity space per person and all schemes should seek to make best use of opportunities for external amenity space taking into account site layout, orientation and building form.
- 4.65 A scheme that does not provide any external amenity space will not be supported.
- 4.66 These outdoor spaces should be high quality and well designed to ensure that they are useable, accessible, attractive and where possible multi-functional. They should also consider how the space could be best used to enhance biodiversity and sustainability.
- 4.67 They should also promote health and wellbeing by providing opportunities for exercise, relaxation, greening and if possible food growing through planting areas or allotment space.
- 4.68 An assessment of climatic conditions should be undertaken to ensure that external spaces are useable with regard to daylight, sunlight and wind.
- 4.69 Co-location with internal amenity space is encouraged to allow for events and socialising to mix between being indoor and outdoor.
- 4.70 Outdoor dining should be encouraged during the warmer months, with shelter, heating and lighting arrangements carefully considered to allow use of these spaces for the maximum amount of time each year.

- 4.71 In accordance with paragraph 3.58 of the Local Plan, the use of roof areas for external communal space, as well as for biodiversity enhancements will be supported provided they are accessible, safe and useable.
- 4.72 All these areas should be located and designed in ways that minimise issues of overlooking and maximise privacy for residents, taking into account the proximity of private rooms on the scheme itself and those in neighbouring buildings.
- 4.73 Although there is not an expectation for private rooms in a co-living scheme to provide them, any private balconies or terraces will be excluded from external amenity space floorspace calculations. Any areas designated for parking, vehicle access, refuse storage or collection, or for plant/utility operation will also be excluded. Areas of small, incidental external space that would not be useable or serve any communal purpose should also not be counted.
- 4.74 All external amenity space should be positively managed and maintained so that it remains in a good condition over the long term. The approach to this short and long term management and maintenance should be set out clearly in the management plan accompanying the application.

Access and Parking

- 4.75 Buildings should be fully accessible in terms of entering/exiting, moving around, and living comfortably in private rooms. Lifts to all floors should be provided in locations that are easily accessible to both private rooms and communal space. Particular consideration should be given to the location of accessible private rooms in proximity to lift cores.
- 4.76 Throughout the scheme there should be an obvious demarcation between private areas that are accessible only to residents and any areas that are publicly accessible. This could be achieved through having a separated secure entry system to the private areas.
- 4.77 In accordance with Policy H03.6, co-living schemes will be centrally located and well served by public transport, supporting a car free lifestyle. The expectation will therefore be that these schemes will incorporate minimal standard car parking spaces if any at all and should usually be 'car free'. Disabled spaces should however be considered on-site in accordance with Policy ST11.5 and paragraph 11.68 of the Local Plan.
- 4.78 Co-living schemes are encouraged to support and advertise the use of local car clubs and bike share schemes as an alternative to private car ownership. Where feasible the provision of a designated car club space on, or in close proximity to, the site would be supported as per Policy ST11.5 and paragraph 11.68 of the Local Plan. Proposals should also explore opportunities for providing a bike share station at or near the proposal.
- 4.79 Given the large number of residents that could be living car free on a co-living scheme, there is likely to be significant demand for postal deliveries, food deliveries, removal vans, as well as other more informal loading and unloading. Emergency vehicles and refuse vehicles also need to be able to access the site as a priority.

- 4.80 Applicants must demonstrate a clear strategy as to how emergency, delivery and service vehicles would access the site safely, conveniently and in a way that does not obstruct a public highway. This should include details of loading bays.
- 4.81 The management plan should include detail on how bin stores are managed, how often the bins are collected, where they are stored and the expectations of residents with regard to disposing of refuse.

Public Realm

- 4.82 A high quality public realm around co-living schemes is vital to the success of the developments integration into the settlement, as well as to resident health and wellbeing. Applicants should provide detailed proposals for the public realm around the site and how it would contribute effectively to place making and achieving a high quality development.
- 4.83 The quantity of public realm being provided should be proportionate to the density of the scheme proposed.
- 4.84 Public realm should promote safety and inclusiveness through its design and management taking into account the needs of different users both within the scheme and the wider community. Contributions towards public realm should seek to achieve good connectivity, and promote different forms of active travel.
- 4.85 Public spaces should be located at ground floor level, as a visible part of the public benefit that can contribute to the street scene and public realm.

Open Space

- 4.86 Whilst co-living developments are expected to provide external amenity space on-site, there will still be a demand for access to formal off-site open space resulting from the development. As such it will be expected that co-living schemes provide open space contributions in accordance with Policy NE9.7 of the Local Plan on the same basis as traditional C3 residential housing schemes.

Affordable Housing

- 5.1 Co-living is not considered to be an affordable housing product as it does not provide stable, long term accommodation that is suitable to meet needs on the Councils housing register, particularly for families.
- 5.2 Whilst co-living does provide an additional housing option for certain people, it does not, as a requirement, meet minimum housing standards that would be required of C3 affordable housing.

- 5.3 Policy HO3.6 of the Local Plan therefore requires that co-living schemes provide a contribution towards affordable housing in accordance with the affordable housing target in Policy HO3.3.
- 5.4 Affordable housing contributions from these schemes will usually be provided through an off-site financial contribution, calculated in accordance with the approach set out in local guidance. Any proposal to provide on-site affordable housing on a co-living development will be considered on a case by case basis.
- 5.5 The level of contribution, and any triggers for payments, will be set out clearly in the associated s106 agreement and should be based on discussions between the applicant and local authority.

Tenancies

- 6.1 There is a concern that co-living schemes could, in effect, operate as hotels, guesthouses or hostels and would therefore not fulfil co-living's unique role as a form of communal living that facilitates social interaction between residents.
- 6.2 Whilst it is not considered appropriate to place a maximum tenancy length on co-living units, a minimum tenancy length of 3 months or 90 days should be applied. Tenancy agreements should be for a specific room within the development to ensure residents have security that they will not be moved from room to room. This should be conditioned in associated s106 agreements and in the Management Plan submitted with the application.
- 6.3 This will ensure that the development is not used for very short term lets resulting in a very quick turnover of residents. This will help to differentiate a co-living scheme from any form of hotel type accommodation.
- 6.4 Tenancies should not permit under 18s to occupy the development. This is due to co-living not being considered secure child suitable accommodation.
- 6.5 Other than in specifically designed two person rooms, tenancies should be for single occupancy and the applicant should provide a maximum number of residents expected on the scheme as part of the application.

Management Plan

- 7.1 In accordance with Policy HO3.6 of the Watford Local Plan, a Management Plan should be submitted alongside any application for a co-living scheme. This Plan should include details on the maximum number of residents that are to be accommodated on-site, how the building and its communal areas will operate in a way that serves the needs of the residents and how the scheme meets the policy requirements as a high quality co-living scheme.

- 7.2 It should set out how the building will be managed in perpetuity and confirm who is responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the site. It should also cover the management of tenancies and how they will meet the requirements of this SPD.
- 7.3 The Plan should also include detailed explanation of how the scheme proposes to deal with the following issues. Note that this list is not exhaustive and any additional detail or issues that the applicant considers to be important or relevant should be included.
- 7.4 The Management Plan will be secured through s106 agreements to ensure that the requirements are applied and secured effectively.

Security and Fire Safety

- 7.5 This information should include arrangements for exiting the building(s) in the event of a fire and what measures are in place, across the scheme, to reduce the risk and impacts of fire. It should also outline what specific measures are to be put in place to ensure safe evacuation of all residents who are unable to evacuate themselves.
- 7.6 The Management Plan should set out clearly how the development, including the private rooms, has complied with the latest fire safety regulations.

Moving in and out

- 7.7 The Management Plan should show where specific loading and unloading space is being provided. This should be a location that does not obstruct any public highway or footpaths. It should also demonstrate that the lifts are easily accessible from these loading spaces to allow large items to be transferred between the ground floor and upper floors easily.

Deliveries

- 7.8 The Management Plan should outline how deliveries will be made to the development in a way that is practical and secure for residents. This should include details of how small and large parcels will be received and stored for residents.

Cleaning and Maintenance

- 7.9 The Management Plan should include details of how the development will be cleaned and maintained to a high standard. This should include all internal and external communal areas, toilet and kitchen areas, and if relevant, the private rooms.

Refuse storage and collection

- 7.10 The Management Plan should clarify how refuse will be collected in communal areas and how residents will be expected to dispose of private refuse for collection. The Plan should also show how the location of communal refuse areas would be suitable in both design and practical terms.

Linen changing

- 7.11 If a compulsory or an optional linen changing service is proposed, details should be provided of how regularly linen from private rooms will be cleaned and changed and how this process will be managed across the whole development.

Reception, security and concierge services

7.12 Any co-living scheme should have dedicated staff that are there to assist residents and visitors with queries, issues and requests. The Management Plan should set out what form this staffing will take, the hours of operation and where possible the main duties that will be expected of such services. Support will be given to the provision, or promotion of counselling services and any other support for residents mental and/or physical wellbeing.

Implementation

8.1 Applications for a co-living scheme must include information that is sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of this SPD, as well as with policies in the Local Plan.

8.2 The following details should be provided in quantitative terms and it should be clearly shown on plans what areas have contributed towards them.

- The size of all private rooms;
- The total amount of internal amenity floorspace and how this is broken down into specific uses, preferably by floor;
- The total amount of external amenity floorspace and how this is broken down into specific uses, preferably by floor.

8.3 Additionally, the plans accompanying the application should clearly show the following:

- The location of communal kitchen facilities;
- The location of communal toilets;
- Any areas that will be publicly accessible;
- Servicing arrangements;
- Access for emergency, refuse and delivery vehicles;
- Communal refuse space;
- Communal cycle storage;
- Communal laundry facilities;
- Indicative layouts of private rooms.

8.4 If a proposal activates Policy QD6.5 as a taller building over the base building heights in Table 6.1 of the Watford Local Plan, a statement should be provided by the applicant to provide details of how the proposal would comply with criteria a-j of the policy.

8.5 A viability assessment should be provided alongside any relevant application on the same basis as for C3 housing schemes. For the purposes of calculating affordable housing contributions, a scheme Gross Development Value (GDV) should be provided as a minimum.

8.6 This SPD becomes a material consideration from the date it is adopted.

Monitoring and Review

- 9.1 Given the emerging nature of co-living as a housing option, particularly in Watford, this SPD will be reviewed regularly to consider whether there is evidence that the requirements of such schemes are changing based on best practice.
- 9.2 Co-living schemes in Watford will be monitored to assess whether the requirements of this SPD are being met. Data on co-living schemes and their adherence to this SPD will be reported on in the Council's Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) going forward.

DRAFT

Appendix 1: Co-Living Compliance Checklists

The below tables summarise the requirements and standards set out in this SPD for both private rooms and internal communal space. These are for use by applicants or development management officers to clearly and easily review a co-living scheme and its compliance with this SPD.

Table A: Private room requirements

Individual room amenities	Additional details	Requirement Met (Y/N)
A double bed		
An en-suite bathroom including the adjacent features as a minimum	Toilet	
	Sink	
	Storage space	
	Shaver socket	
	Mirror (or wall space where one can be hung)	
	Demarcated shower area.	
Seating/dining space including the adjacent features as a minimum	Table	
	Dining chair	
	Armchair	
Kitchenette including the adjacent features as a minimum	Plug sockets for small appliances	
	Enough counter space to allow small appliances like a toaster and kettle to be permanently places and for basic food preparation to be done.	
	Hob plates	
	Fridge	
	Sink and drainage space	
A wardrobe	As a minimum, a space for hanging clothes straight	
Desk space	With suitably located plug sockets	
Storage space	Within the bathroom, and the living space. Preference for both shelves and concealed storage	

Table B: Areas to be included within the calculation of Internal amenity space

Type of Internal amenity space	To be included in calculation of internal amenity space per resident	Additional notes	Floorspace to be included (sqm)
Communal Kitchen space	Yes	Communal kitchens to include the following features: Oven space; Hob space; Microwaves; Fridge/Freezers; Dishwashers; Refuse facilities; Storage areas; plug sockets; sink and drainage space.	
Communal Dining space	Yes		
Living rooms and lounge areas	Yes		
Communal workspaces	Yes	Should include individual workstations with a preference for contained meeting rooms	
Communal gyms and fitness spaces	Yes	Provided they are free of charge and for the exclusive use of residents	
Other leisure facilities	Yes	Other internal communal leisure and recreation facilities that are not excluded in Table C. An application will need to specify what these facilities are.	
Total internal communal floorspace			

Table C: Areas to be excluded from the calculation of internal amenity space

Spaces to be excluded from internal amenity space calculation	Additional notes
Laundry and drying areas	Preference is for multiple smaller washers and/or dryers as opposed to fewer larger ones.
Communal toilets	The cleaning and servicing arrangements for communal bathrooms should be outlined in the Management Plan.
Any storage areas	These include individual lockers and larger storage areas for bulky items that do not fit comfortably in private rooms as well as post rooms.
Any external amenity spaces	These spaces should be recorded separately within an application
Transitional areas	These include corridors, stairs, lifts and reception/lobby areas.
Parking areas	For either cars, bicycles or any other vehicles.
Space that is used predominantly by on-site management, facilities or staff.	